



June 5, 2004

Dear Colleagues,

In June 2002, President George W. Bush launched his HealthierUS Initiative based on the premise that increasing personal fitness and becoming healthier is essential to attaining an improved and longer life. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson and I are committed to working with other federal departments in improving the health of our nation by taking appropriate preventative measures to reduce the rates of chronic diseases, such as obesity and diabetes. Overweight and obesity are the fastest-growing causes of preventable death in America. Nearly two out of three Americans are overweight or obese. More disturbing is that nearly fifteen percent of our children and teenagers are overweight.

Increasingly, we should recognize that we are partners in the business of disease prevention and health promotion, and I am asking for your help so that we may act together to curb these deadly trends.

You are key members of America's public health team. Land managers, recreation enthusiasts, physicians and health care professionals all play a vital role in helping people understand that physical activity can be as simple as volunteering on public lands, exploring a trail into the woods, or biking on an urban greenway.

Increasing physical activity is an integral part of a healthy lifestyle, and outdoor recreation is the natural solution. I am committed to this concept and its potential for helping foster a healthier country. Being outdoors offers a natural respite from daily tension and stress. Being active in these natural settings can also provide mental health benefits. I ask you to join me in promoting this message among all Americans.

There is an enormous network of trails, parks, forests, refuges, and waterways that Americans can use. These public lands and waters improve quality of life and well-being for entire communities. Together, we will support continued efforts to further increase access to recreational opportunities on public lands in the places where Americans live, work, and play.

By working together, we increase our potential in bringing about necessary behavior changes which lead to positive health benefits. Collectively representing nearly one in three acres of land in the United States, the federal recreation infrastructure alone provides an unprecedented capacity to communicate and distribute health messages to nearly a billion visitors per year.

Thank you for all you do to improve the lives of all Americans and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,


Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.S.
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United States Surgeon General