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UCLA CENTER FOR HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH

(The full study and related county level data are available online at www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu)

One in Seven California Adults Suffers from or Is at Risk for Diabetes, New CHIS Data Shows

Los Angeles, CA, April 30, 2003... One in seven California adults suffers from or is at significant risk for diabetes, according to a major, comprehensive study released today by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. The findings, based on data from the 2001 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS 2001), put California ahead of national diabetes rates for every population segment under 65 years of age and show heightened disparities for communities of color, people with low income, or those in rural areas.

“As Californians in ever-increasing numbers fall victim to obesity and inactivity, we’re seeing a corresponding increase in one of the nation’s most prevalent chronic conditions,” explains report lead author Allison L. Diamant, MD, MSHS, of the UCLA School of Medicine and Faculty Associate at the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. “The tragedy is that this largely preventable killer is incurable, trapping millions of Californians into a life of treatment, as well as potential for complications and suffering.”

The Center’s report, *Diabetes in California: Findings from the 2001 California Health Interview Survey*, is based on a telephone survey of more than 55,000 Californians and provides a definitive statewide and county-by-county understanding of this health condition. The report offers the most authoritative look at adult diabetes prevalence levels in California to date, as well as some of the factors that affect the development of diabetes and related disparities.

While California’s overall adult diabetes prevalence rate of 5.9 percent mirrors national numbers, the study’s detailed breakdown by population groups unveils a far more worrisome picture with notable disparities by education and income, as well as by race and ethnicity and geographic location.

According to the CHIS 2001 data, African Americans living in California are most afflicted by diabetes (10.3 percent), suffering from this disease nearly twice as frequently as whites (5.6 percent). With a diabetes rate of 9.3 percent, American Indians and Alaska Natives also suffer disproportionately

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from diabetes. And while the overall prevalence rate for Latinos is 6 percent, that figure belies the very high prevalence among Latino seniors – 24.4 percent as compared with the state average of 14.3 percent for adults over 65 years of age.

“While diabetes may be color blind, it’s clear that the conditions and environments in which it breeds are not,” said American Diabetes Association President Francine R. Kaufman, MD. “These disparities must be addressed at their root to protect the health of Californians. We have to fundamentally change the factors that spawn this incurable condition.”

Two of those contributing factors identified by the study are low levels of education and income. Prevalence rates among respondents declined in direct relationship to the level of schooling attained, with college graduates less than half as likely to suffer from diabetes (4.3 percent) as respondents with an eighth grade or less education (9.9 percent). Likewise, poverty seems to be an indicator for diabetes. Low-income respondents had a significantly higher rate than their middle- and upper-income counterparts.

“The health of California is in a tailspin,” remarked California State Senator Martha Escutia (D-Whittier). “We cannot accept these numbers as status quo – people’s lives are at stake. If we do not make diabetes control and prevention a personal, community and policy priority, we are looking at increased suffering, higher mortality rates, greater government costs and possibly the first drop in life expectancy figures in a century.”

Analysis of the data by county shows a checkerboard of prevalence, with rural regions most affected by the condition. Tulare, Imperial, Kings, Sutter and Yuba counties had the highest diabetes rates (9.9, 9, 8 and 8 percent, respectively). Marin, El Dorado and Santa Cruz counties had the lowest prevalence (3.7, 3.7 and 3.9 percent, respectively).

But these numbers could climb significantly. All told, the authors estimate that an additional 1.8 million California adults (8.2 percent) are at significant risk for diabetes based on their sedentary lifestyles and being overweight or obese. These findings support a California Diabetes Control Program prediction that the state’s prevalence of diabetes will double by the year 2020.

“Our love affair with fast food, soda and the remote control is taking us down a deadly path,” said Marion Standish, JD, Senior Program Officer for The California Endowment, a private, statewide health foundation that funded the diabetes study. “The situation is even more alarming in light of the record high levels of childhood obesity and inactivity – key predictors of diabetes – that place California’s next generation at serious risk.”

In light of these findings, The California Endowment joins with the UCLA Center for Health

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Policy Research in calling for policy recommendations aimed at preventing obesity, ensuring access to preventive health care, and promoting effective and culturally competent diabetes management. The Endowment is making a multi-year commitment to invest in physical activity and nutrition programs to reduce obesity among the state's at-risk youth.

The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, established in 1994, is a leading source of health policy information for California and the nation. Based in the UCLA School of Public Health, it is also affiliated with the UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research. The Center's mission is to understand and advance public policies that can improve access to health care and the health status of the diverse population in California and the nation. Key health policy areas at the local, state, and national levels informed by the Center's work include – access to health care and insurance coverage, health promotion and disease prevention, management of chronic conditions and public programs and the economics and systems of health care.

The Center's studies focus on the health needs of communities and populations that are at risk for adverse health conditions or are underserved by the health care system. The Center is the home of the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). For more information on the Center, CHIS or other publications, visit www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu.

The California Endowment was established in 1996 to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. Headquartered in Woodland Hills, The Endowment has regional offices in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno, and San Diego, with program staff working throughout the state. The Endowment makes grants to organizations and institutions that directly benefit the health and well-being of the people of California. For more information, visit The Endowment's Web site at www.calendow.org.

Copies of the study as well as breakdowns of the data by county are available online at www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu and at www.calendow.org.

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