

Realizing the Vision for a Healthy California

Opportunities in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

With passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Governor Schwarzenegger and the State Legislature have an important opportunity to leverage federal stimulus dollars for health-promoting infrastructure and programs that will jumpstart the economy, promote equitable health and safety outcomes, and improve the business climate in California.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provides a catalyst for Governor Schwarzenegger and the State Legislature to lead California out of its economic crisis while establishing a ground-breaking, long-term legacy of health and equity. With focused investments in transportation, housing and community development, workforce development, health, and education, stimulus dollars can make the vision for a healthy California a reality.

California needs sound investments in our infrastructure that are just as good for our economy as our health. Illness and injuries place a great burden on California, causing steep medical care costs and productivity losses. Chronic illnesses like Type 2 diabetes, cancer, and heart disease threaten the well-being and productivity of our people and our economy. The state's priorities—new construction, infrastructure repair, job creation, housing stability, and sustainable business practices—can go hand-in-hand with initiatives that support equitable health and safety outcomes. Examples of projects that create jobs, bolster the economy, *and* support health include: safe, walkable, and bikable streets; public transit; safe and accessible playgrounds, parks, and school fields; healthy food retail; and regional sustainable agricultural systems.

In tandem with building health-promoting infrastructure, the current administration should protect programs that bring federal dollars into California and ensure full participation in those programs by eligible families. This will maximize stimulus dollars coming into the state for federal-state programs like food stamps and Medi-Cal. Maintaining and improving these programs can increase the flow of stimulus dollars to the state budget and provide more money for Californians hardest hit by the economic downturn, allowing them to eat healthy, get active, and participate in commerce that generates economic activity for all.

The Strategic Alliance for Healthy Food and Activity Environments recommends swift actions and investments that will improve health and safety for all Californians. With criteria that investments should promote equity, a healthy environment, and healthy people, stimulus dollars should lift up communities that need it the most: communities of color and low-income communities with high rates of chronic illness, limited access to healthy food, disproportionately fewer opportunities for physical activity, and unequal access to safe parks, schools, and health resources. We recommend that the Governor, the Legislature, and State Departments:

- Prioritize access to healthy food and safe drinking water in high-need communities.
- Leverage investments to create and maintain recreation and physical activity opportunities where access is limited.
- Emphasize health, equity, and the environment by supporting walking, biking, and public transportation.
- Make equitable investments in the nutrition and physical activity infrastructure in California schools.
- Focus workforce funds in communities and sectors that need it most.
- Devote resources to increase effectiveness of nutrition, health, and human services for families.
- Ensure that all community development, transportation, and infrastructure projects adhere to principals and criteria for healthy and equitable land use.
- Establish a community prevention and wellness initiative to reduce health inequities and promote healthy communities in California.

The following represents the Strategic Alliance analysis, to date, of the potential opportunities for California to leverage ARRA funds to *realize the vision for a healthy California*.

Prioritize access to healthy food and safe drinking water in high-need communities.

Investments in healthy food retail and sustainable regional food systems can generate construction and retail jobs; stimulate community and economic development and increase accessibility to California-grown agriculture. Funding for safe drinking water can bring this healthy beverage within reach of families in greatest need.

ARRA resources can be used in California to:

- finance supermarkets, grocery stores, farmers' markets and other healthy food retail in rural and urban underserved, low-income communities with Community Development funds;
- invest Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SDWSRF) dollars based on need and public health priorities, rather than a first-come, first-serve basis; and
- support sustainable regional food systems that help small- and mid-sized and minority- and women-owned farms and distributors get healthy products to market.

Fresh food in food deserts

Proximity to supermarkets has been associated with higher fruit and vegetable consumption and lower saturated fat consumption, yet many communities in California lack access to accessible, affordable fresh food.¹ Throughout the state, communities that have a high ratio of fast food and convenience stores to grocery stores and fresh produce vendors have a significantly higher prevalence of obesity and diabetes.² Increasing access to affordable, fresh food in low-income communities can help prevent diet-related chronic diseases.

The Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program has the potential to be used for healthy food retail. Though funds may be disbursed directly to local community development agencies, the HUD Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD) in California can play a central role in coordinating with local agencies to prioritize "shovel-ready" food retail projects. Food retail projects can be large or small, so they represent excellent investments for CDBG funds, given the federal requirement that projects be "ready to go" within 120 days. Investments in healthy food retail not only increase access to fresh foods, they also stimulate good jobs. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimated that California's share of all HUD funds would be between \$1.1 and \$1.3 billion;* of this CDBG funds (approximately \$123 million in CA) could be used for neighborhood economic development strategies like food retail.

Safe water in low-income communities and communities of color

As the Department of Public Health solicits awards and allocates the \$159 million for safe water projects, SDWSRF should be prioritized for *disadvantaged* communities with high rates of chronic conditions and limited access to health resources. Safe and healthy tap water is a key ingredient for healthy food preparation and increasing access to safe water is part of a strategy to limit access to unhealthy beverages that contribute to poor health outcomes, such as dental problems and diabetes. It should be noted that the state's Department of Environmental Health, which administers the SDWSRF, received a total of 2,274 pre-applications (for stimulus funding) total-

* The dollar amounts referenced in this report were accessed from the Legislative Analyst's Office March 10, 2009 report, 2009-10 Budget Analysis Series: Federal Economic Stimulus Package—Fiscal Effect on California, March 10, 2009, Accessed March 11, 2009 at: www.lao.ca.gov/2009/bud/fed_stimulus/fed_stimulus_031009.pdf

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ing \$6.8 billion in projects. While the \$159 million in stimulus dollars represents a significant source of support for the state, a great unmet need for safe water systems exists. Water projects provide jobs for Californians. A federal estimate indicates that with the \$159 million coming to CA's SDWSRF, more than 15,000 jobs will be created or retained. The Department has a history of utilizing local contractors from within the local communities where water projects are being done, including an emphasis on contractors who speak the language of residents.³

Support sustainable, regional food

ARRA includes nearly \$3 billion (nationally) for the Rural Business and Industry Loan Guarantee Program (B&I) which can be used to promote rural economic development and preserve jobs in agriculture and food production. A provision in the 2008 Farm Bill will make 5% of B&I funds, or \$125 million, available to support local and regional food enterprises that address limited food access, high rates of hunger, poverty, or food insecurity.

In California, a regional sustainable food system should reduce agriculture's contribution to greenhouse gases by reducing vehicle miles travelled (VMT) and use of pesticides; provide supports for local, small-, and mid-sized farmers; and improve the affordability and availability of nutritious, high-quality, California-grown foods.

USDA has appointed a Rural Development Director in California to publicize and promote B&I to eligible stakeholders, including the banking community, farmers, business owners, and advocates. Rural economic development should emphasize equity, a clean environment, and safe and healthy food production and distribution.

Leverage investments to create and maintain recreation and physical activity opportunities where access is limited.

People of color and low-income people throughout California disproportionately suffer from inequalities in access to and availability of parks, playgrounds, and trails and these same communities experience disproportionately high rates of inactivity-related illnesses like Type 2 Diabetes.^{4,5} ARRA will provide funding to the National Park Service through the Department of the Interior for projects that can support the creation or maintenance of parks, playgrounds, and trails. ARRA will also provide state and local funding streams that can be used to prioritize and support physical activity opportunities. Where flexibility exists, funds should prioritize construction projects that build in activity-promoting infrastructure, particularly in park-poor and economically disadvantaged communities.

ARRA resources can likely be used in California to:

- convert vacant lots, utilize abandoned properties, and eliminate blight for recreational purposes using neighborhood stabilization and community development block grant funds;
- rehabilitate brownfields that can provide *safe and healthy* recreation and activity options, using Brownfield Program Funds;
- direct Workforce Investment funds to workers and programs to support park and recreation projects; and
- invest in projects that conserve energy like bike paths, pedestrian walkways, and conservation programs using Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants.

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Eliminate blight; invest in neighborhoods

Community Development Block Grants and Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds provide prime opportunities to jumpstart park and recreation projects while redeveloping vacant and blighted properties. Recreation projects such as parks, playgrounds, and community gardens are excellent candidates for stimulus dollars because they can be completed in a shorter time period than more complex development projects. Furthermore, with the passage of AB 31 following Proposition 84, California voters approved \$386 million to create parks in economically disadvantaged and park-poor communities. Stimulus funds could be leveraged to catalyze park and job development in these communities, putting them in a stronger position to apply for state park funds later. The state's Department of Housing and Community Development will administer programs to quickly disburse housing monies (estimated between \$1.1 and 1.3 billion for California). Quality projects will include opportunities for both children and adults to get physically active. Project proposals that include walking and biking infrastructure, swimming pools, community gardens, and other opportunities for physical activity should receive priority funding.

Remediate brownfields for safe, recreational purposes

Stimulus funds provide \$100 million (nationally) to the Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfield Program to clean, revitalize, and create sustainable uses of contaminated properties. The state of California's Department of Toxic Substances Control would be the most likely eligible applicant to any of the EPA's four brownfield grant programs: 1) job training, 2) assessment, 3) revolving loan fund, or 4) cleanup grants. The state can also emphasize or provide guidance on project(s) that meet a dual purpose of decontaminating a brownfield and supporting safe physical activity.

Invest in a park and recreation workforce

Workforce Investment Act funds can be used for younger, older, and dislocated workers. While a significant portion of the funds will go to local workforce investment boards, nearly \$74 million is available for California's state discretionary purposes which could employ California Conservation Corps (CCC) and AmeriCorps personnel to work on park and recreation projects. Green jobs are to be given priority under the Act. Park and recreation facilities can provide tangible projects in the state's high-need communities.

Combine energy efficiency with park and recreation needs

The state's Energy Commission will receive \$56 million in Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG). The state can use \$22 million for projects that reduce overall energy consumption, such as bike paths and walkways, conservation programs, flex-time for workers, and smart-growth zoning. The state will pass the remaining \$34 million on to cities; and an additional \$400 million will be awarded through a competitive grants program. In this role, the state can prioritize energy conservation projects that target communities in greatest need of parks and trails and where jobs are most needed. Priority projects for EECBG funds should factor in park poverty* or trail miles and economic poverty combined.⁶ Targeting park poverty and economic poverty together will help achieve energy conservation and equitable access to public resources for the most underserved communities.

* A working definition of park poverty is less than three acres of park land per 1,000 residents.

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Emphasize health, equity, and the environment by supporting walking, bicycling, and public transportation.

Transportation programs received the largest outlay from ARRA: California will receive an estimated \$3.6 billion. The Governor has already signed AB 3x 20, which designates parameters for how California will spend surface transportation funds: the state will allocate 37.5% of the funds and regions will allocate 62.5%. As transportation projects are being considered, the state should prioritize projects that improve health, equity, and the environment while generating jobs and reducing energy consumption. Infrastructure for walking, bicycling, and public transit is essential to the state's transportation network and must address current inequities and the urgent need to reduce emissions. Residents of walkable, bikeable communities with access to public transportation tend to have higher levels of physical activity.^{7,8} In low-income communities, residents rely on public transit, safe walkways, and bikeways often because they can not afford or access a car. Stimulus dollars can focus on areas of chronic disinvestment and underfunding. Transportation projects can create jobs in high-need communities.

To maximize ARRA funds in California, the Governor and Legislature should:

- prioritize funding and accelerate progress on infrastructure projects that include public transportation, bicycle lanes and paths, walkways, and parks or other physical activity facilities in underserved communities;
- ensure a mechanism to prioritize state-federal transportation projects that emphasize health and safety for all users (including bicyclists and pedestrians), especially in low-income neighborhoods where access to jobs and infrastructure is most needed;
- fix it first: maintain, repair, and implement routine accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists on *existing* roadway networks before investing in roadway expansion or new construction projects;
- facilitate coordination between state agencies and partners so that California does not risk losing uncommitted funds, and ensure effective communication of the ongoing, unmet transportation needs in California's low-income communities; and
- ensure that Safe Routes to School contracts *already awarded by Caltrans* will be processed in a timely manner.

Prioritize public transit, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure in high-need communities

The Highway Infrastructure Investment provision emphasizes that of the \$27.5 billion available (nationally), funding priority should be given to projects that: 1) can be obligated quickly, and 2) are located within economically-distressed areas. State Department of Transportation and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) project choices must emphasize the need for bicycle, pedestrian, Safe Routes to School, and transit projects in communities that need them most, using high rates of poverty and unemployment as important indicators of economic distress. At least 3% of highway infrastructure apportionments—about \$77 million in California—must be set aside for transportation enhancement projects to provide improvements in nonautomobile-travel infrastructure; these funds should be used for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects.

Infrastructure for walking, bicycling, and public transit is essential to the state's transportation network and must address current inequities and the urgent need to reduce emissions.

In addition to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, public transit projects represent a key opportunity to provide transportation resources to low-income communities. Transit Capital Assistance funds can be used to purchase buses and equipment needed to increase public transportation and improve intermodal and transit facilities. In addition, these formula funds may be used to pay for preventative maintenance projects. While California law considers routine maintenance and operations costs, preventative maintenance is an eligible expense within the federal program. Using federal transit capital funds in this way may free up other more tightly constrained operations funds for transit operators in the state. This is an important opportunity for local transit operators to get some relief from the impact of the state legislature's recent move to defund public transportation operations over the next five years. The California Budget Project estimates the state's portion of transit capital funds to be \$1 billion. The California High Speed Rail Authority stands to receive significant federal funding and must not lose sight of the intent to fund inner-city rail. These funds can be used to expand and create new public transit services in the communities with the greatest need.

Fix it first: invest in existing infrastructure and complete the streets

The Administration can use highway funds for maintenance and renovation of existing facilities to create “complete streets”—roads that include bicycle and pedestrian facilities where they do not currently exist. A “fix it first” provision will save money on the repairs of those roads and bridges in the long run, as deferred maintenance will only get more expensive. Other benefits include:

- improved safety and functioning of the existing network;
- more opportunities to “complete the streets” on existing road networks;
- the potential to reduce vehicle-miles traveled (VMT) by increasing the flexibility and transportation options of the existing system; and
- greater ability to fulfill California's climate change goals and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions due to fewer VMT

Priority should be given to projects that create complete streets. Although Caltrans has a complete streets policy, and the state adopted AB1358 in 2008 requiring complete streets elements in future general plans, there is a danger that, without provisions stipulated in the state legislation about how recovery funds shall be spent, some agencies may not comply with complete streets requirements. In addition, Caltrans' policy will not affect MPOs or cities and counties unless it is specified as a requirement by state legislation. A greater focus on complete streets will improve safety for all roadway users. State legislation for the economic recovery bill should require the California Department of Transportation and other agencies receiving ARRA funding for transportation projects to prioritize projects consistent with the Department's internal complete streets policy.

Facilitate collaboration

Identifying high-need projects that are eligible for stimulus dollars within the 120 and 365 day benchmarks will require effective communication and collaboration. State agencies, including the Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Health's Healthy Transportation Network and community partners like California Safe Routes to School Network must work together to ensure that local communities that most need transportation improvements get them.

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Keep Safe Routes to School (SRTS) projects on track

Federal resources for Safe Routes to School infrastructure and programming in California have been held up in Caltrans for over a year. The Administration should give direction to Caltrans headquarters and districts to keep Safe Routes to School projects moving while they are working on the stimulus. This is critical for assisting local communities with improvements that would make it safer for California's students to walk and bicycle to school.

Make equitable investments in the nutrition and physical activity infrastructure in California schools.

California will receive nearly \$8 billion from ARRA and will be eligible for billions more in grants, loans, subsidies, and bonds. Prudent investments will ensure that new facilities and programs prepare students for the 21st century—giving them the resources to be healthy, fit, and ready to learn.

In California, the Governor and the Department of Education should:

- prioritize school modernization and construction bond funds for joint-use capital projects that create increased opportunities for physical activity for both students and community members at severe-need schools;
- modernize schools, especially older facilities, so that they have safe plumbing systems that provide clean, fresh, and free water to students, particularly in every school eating area;
- ensure that grant funds for school nutrition equipment are primarily used to improve meal quality and initiate breakfast programs in schools with the greatest need; and
- improve nutrition and activity quality in licensed child care settings.

Health promoting capital investments in high-need communities

School Modernization funds (\$1 billion in California) and Subsidized School Construction Bonds (\$22 billion available nationally) should support new and upgraded facilities that can be used for physical activity and healthy eating by students and community residents. Funds, when they pass through the California Department of Education, should be allocated based on need—not a first-come, first-served basis. Severe-need schools—schools where at least 40% of students eating school meals are low-income—should receive the first priority. Under the state education code, outdoor recreation facilities like pools and playgrounds are not currently eligible for funds allocated for shared use. Particularly in communities that lack adequate park spaces, not funding joint use of outdoor facilities contradicts the spirit of joint use which is to allow schools and communities to share available resources. School modernization funds and School Construction Bonds could be used to fill this funding gap.

Safe drinking water for students

With the \$159 million available in California from the Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, the state can upgrade drinking water infrastructure in water systems that serve our schools and communities. School modernization funds coming through the Department of Education can be used to ensure that plumbing lines that bring water to students through water fountains, for example, are safe and free from lead. Today, many California students have limited access to

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free, fresh, and safe water in their school cafeterias and vending machines due to old plumbing and restrictive contracting with beverage companies that make soda and juice more readily available. Improving the safety of the water delivered to schools and emphasizing the ready availability of safe tap water improves access to this healthy beverage. Research indicates that reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is a key strategy in preventing overweight and promoting dental health.^{9,10}

School nutrition equipment investments in low-income schools

California will receive nearly \$13 million for a competitive grant program for school nutrition equipment assistance. The grants “are to be based on the need for equipment assistance in participating schools with priority given to schools in which not less than 50% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.” USDA guidelines identify four major focus areas that the grants should promote: 1) improving meal quality, 2) improving food safety, 3) improving school foodservice energy-efficiency, and 4) expanding participation. Stimulus funds offer a unique opportunity to ensure that California’s most vulnerable children have access to nutritious, high-quality school meals. Stimulus resources should be used to build on-site cooking and food preparation facilities in low-income schools to allow for healthier food in the school meal program. In California, where there is severe underutilization of the School Breakfast Program, equipment that will help to eliminate that gap should be a special focus for the funds.

Improve nutrition and activity quality in child care

ARRA funds in the Child Care and Development Block Grant can be set aside for development, implementation, and evaluation of pilot programs that aim to improve nutrition quality in licensed child care settings. The federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Program sets current standards for nutrition in childcare facilities; however, these requirements are antiquated. A number of promising strategies for improving nutrition quality in child care exist, including the Linking Education, Activity, and Food (LEAF) program, which the California Department of Education (CDE), Nutrition Services Division used to test and evaluate methods for improving nutrition quality in schools’ competitive foods and beverages.

California is expected to receive at least \$9 million for the Child Care and Development Block grant with funding coming first from the federal government to the Governor and then directed to the CDE. CDE can use \$800,000 to \$900,000 of this funding to implement and evaluate a number of LEAF-type grants to test the feasibility of various methods to improve nutrition quality in child care.

Focus workforce investments in communities and sectors that need it most.

When California residents are unemployed they are less likely to participate in commerce, slowing economic activity. Employment status is associated with health and chronically high unemployment rates are disproportionately found in communities of color, where health outcomes also tend to lag behind state averages. New jobs should lift people out of poverty so they can attain better health. By focusing workforce investments in the health, environment, transportation, and technology sectors, Californians can get to work creating a health-promoting infrastructure.

Stimulus funds offer a unique opportunity to ensure that California’s most vulnerable children have access to nutritious, high-quality school meals.

To reverse current trends in unemployment and job-losses, all Californians need sustainable jobs, a steady income, and ongoing pathways for education and advancement.

With about \$494 million available to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and the potential to secure more through the competitive job training grants that federal departments will administer, California can focus youth, adult, and displaced worker funds in the communities with greatest need and can provide guidance to the local workforce investment boards.

To maximize ARRA funds in California, the Governor and Legislature can:

- emphasize job training, recruitment, and retention from within low-income communities where unemployment rates are highest and where construction and infrastructure projects are needed most; and
- tie ongoing funding of infrastructure projects to local hiring in disadvantaged communities and to health and safety outcomes for workers, local communities, and all Californians.

Jobs in high-need communities first

ARRA places a clear emphasis on job creation in high-need communities. The newly formed Governor's Green Corps will dedicate \$10 million in stimulus dollars to place at-risk youth aged 16 to 24 into green jobs over the next 20 months. Green Corps represents an excellent down-payment on the broader effort needed to stimulate jobs in low-income communities. Project Labor Agreements provide a mechanism to ensure that local infrastructure projects maintain health, safety, and wage standards and they can also require that a set percentage of jobs are created for, or in, underserved communities. In Los Angeles, with support from the UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, labor unions and community based organizations have worked with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to use project labor agreements to embed commitments to local hiring and 2nd Chance Apprenticeship programs for all infrastructure projects funded by the city's Community Redevelopment Agency. Similar agreements have been reached on a project-by-project basis with the Ports Commission, the Parks Commission, and the Los Angeles Unified School District.¹¹ Public entities—including Caltrans and CDE—can require the use of Project Labor Agreements for stimulus projects.

Long-term funding for long-term jobs

In addition to jump-starting the economy with ready-to-go jobs, communities grappling with persistent unemployment need investments that will yield long-term employment opportunities. To reverse current trends in unemployment and job-losses, all Californians need sustainable jobs, a steady income, and ongoing pathways for education and advancement. Workforce training and apprenticeship programs that help lower-income people and people of color access quality employment in construction, development, technology, and the green economy also build a pipeline for future workers. To supplement WIA funding for workforce training, the state can urge departments with stimulus-funded infrastructure projects to set aside a minimum of 1% of project funds for workforce education and apprenticeship programs that commit to first-source hiring policies to benefit low-income residents and people of color.¹²

The California State Secretary of Business, Housing, and Transportation works with each region in the state to develop regional recovery plans. In addition to describing planned infrastructure projects, the plans require each region to describe capacity to address high unemployment rates and plans for job training and placement. The Secretary should work with all regions to develop a recovery strategy that is long-term, strengthens career pathways to middle-skill construction and

technology jobs, and expands workforce training opportunities in regions with high rates of under- and unemployment.

State-approved apprenticeship programs, high school career academies, and community college workforce programs that partner with business and community organizations should receive priority access to ARRA's workforce education and training funds.

Devote resources to increase effectiveness of nutrition, health and human services for families.

Many federal-state health programs bring money into California. Strengthening—rather than cutting—health and safety programs that bring federal dollars into California (e.g., Cal Works, Federal Nutrition Programs, Medi-Cal) creates a gateway for ARRA infusions, ensures that California maximizes federal funds, and generates additional spending by participants. Low-income and working families regularly defer spending to meet basic needs like food and clothing. They are most likely to put cash aid right back into the economy as they meet those deferred needs. Studies have found that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) contributes to stimulating the economy, as every dollar in new SNAP benefits generates nearly twice as much in total community spending.¹³

To get the most of ARRA dollars, the Governor and Legislature should:

- ensure that WIC can continue to fully comply with all federal laws and regulations by immediately exempting the WIC Supplemental Nutrition Division from all deficit reduction measures;
- get more Food Stamp Stimulus funds flowing into California by removing state-imposed barriers that increase paperwork and add unnecessary trips to the food stamp office for needy households;
- eliminate reporting requirements and improve reimbursement procedures for Medi-Cal to ensure maximum federal funds; and
- protect, rather than cut, cash aid programs like SSI and CalWorks that keep families afloat.

Exempt WIC from deficit reduction measures

The blanket furlough and travel freeze for state employees will result in catastrophic damage to the best-managed, most efficient and effective WIC program in the nation. Since California WIC is 100% federally funded, WIC cost savings achieved by these budget measures will not relieve or address a single cent of the state's general fund deficit. Moreover, these measures are taking place just when state and local staff are about to implement health-giving improvements to WIC foods, using—for the first time in our nation's history—innovative and state-centralized nutrition service coordination, carefully planned by state experts and supported by local staff.

Pass the Food Stamp Modernization Act of 2009

The federal stimulus bill will pump \$1.4 billion in nutrition benefits into the state through the Food Stamp Program. Food Stamps don't just improve nutrition, they also help our state's agricultural growers and grocers. To get more federal funds to California, policymakers can remove barriers to participation by passing the Food Stamp Modernization Act of 2009. This bill would

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reduce paperwork to keep families from falling off the program and provide administrative relief for counties who are struggling to keep up with increased demand. It will also remove trips to the food stamp office by replacing the finger print requirement with a Department of Motor Vehicles match. Because of poor participation, California is losing a potential \$2 billion in federal funds.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

TEFAP supplements the food needs of families by supplying food items each month. California is estimated to receive \$12 million in ARRA funds to support this program. The state should ensure that these funds are used in the most expeditious way possible and for the purchase of the most nutritious food available. Food banks should be given the option—and encouraged—to purchase California produce because it can be done quickly and supports California agriculture and the health of families most vulnerable to food insecurity.

Make timely fixes to Medi-Cal

The state could receive \$10.1 billion to administer Medi-Cal, but it needs to reduce wait times and paperwork hassles and streamline enrollment and reimbursement processes for health insurance so that all families in need of assistance can access it. Streamlined processes will ensure that Californians maximize participation in Medi-Cal and that the state draws down most available federal resources.

Protect cash aid programs like SSI and CalWorks

Families utilize cash aid to meet a number of basic needs, including nutrition. The recent budget agreement passed by the state legislature and signed by the Governor would require cuts to a number of cash assistance programs if the \$10 billion trigger of stimulus funds in California is not reached. Programs that would be affected include CalWORKS (\$450 million ARRA in California) and direct payments from Supplemental Security Income, Social Security, and food stamps (estimated \$2.2 billion ARRA in California). Cutting cash aid will not only result in poor nutrition but would actually cause California to lose out on the stimulus effect intended by Congress.

Ensure all community development, transportation, and infrastructure projects adhere to principals and criteria for healthy and equitable land use.

California has initiated a process of prioritizing environmental and health protection through the landmark bills, AB 32 and SB 375. Stimulus funds should support efforts that reinforce the intent of these laws. When requesting stimulus funds, local and regional governments and agencies should incorporate health, safety, and environmental protection goals. Community development, transportation, and infrastructure projects that incorporate these goals—including compact, connected, mixed-use developments—have the capacity to positively impact health behaviors, such as walking and biking.¹⁴ In contrast to low-density land use (i.e., sprawl) which has been associated with a greater number of vehicle miles traveled, high density, mixed-use developments are associated with decreased numbers of single-occupant vehicle trips.^{15,16}

To support the intent of ARRA funds, the Legislature should:

- ensure that stimulus-funded infrastructure investments incorporate healthy and equitable environment principles.

Incorporate health and equity in all infrastructure projects

Infrastructure projects emerging from the stimulus should support, not undermine, health. In addition to traditional criteria for air quality and noise, development criteria should include: safe and adequate housing; affordable nutritious food; safe parks and public spaces; accessible and affordable transit; walking and bicycling infrastructure; and compact, connected, mixed-use development. Health criteria can be used by local health and planning institutions to identify and prioritize local stimulus projects and by state departments as they prioritize worthy projects and/or provide guidance to federal programs that will provide additional grants to the state. Health impact assessment is an emerging tool that can be utilized to ensure that health criteria are considered, while still adhering to time constraints and the need for “shovel-ready” projects required to access stimulus dollars.

Establish a community prevention and wellness initiative to reduce health inequities and promote healthy communities in California.

In California, an investment of \$10 per person per year in community-based programs to create environments that support healthy eating and physical activity could prevent chronic disease, reduce health inequities, and yield savings of more than \$84 million in annual Medi-Cal costs after 5 years.¹⁷ The Community Makeover Initiative concept, which the Schwarzenegger Administration advanced as part of the health care reform discussions in 2007, could be reinvigorated through the \$650 million that will become available nationally under the Prevention and Wellness Fund.¹⁸

ARRA’s Prevention and Wellness funds could be combined with other sources to:

- direct resources to high-need communities including those with higher rates of chronic disease, communities with disproportionately fewer resources for community health, and communities of color and low-income communities;
- establish a mechanism for public accountability and engage Californians’ expertise to inform the initiative;
- provide high-quality training and technical support for localities;
- integrate health and prevention benchmarks across government sectors; and
- utilize health workforce dollars to train public health and health care workers to provide support for community-based prevention and wellness initiatives.

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All sectors of government can use a health lens to inform decision-making and no government entity should make decisions counter to the health and well-being of Californians.

Prevention and wellness in high-need communities first

Differences in health behaviors and outcomes fall disproportionately on low-income communities and among people of color. These communities disproportionately suffer from unequal access to health-promoting infrastructure, such as parks, playgrounds, and trails at the same time that they experience disproportionately high rates of inactivity-related illnesses like Type 2 diabetes. Like other ARRA funds, high-need communities should receive priority for Prevention and Wellness funds.

Build on lessons learned and expert knowledge

California is fortunate to have a robust movement that uses community health strategies and policy change to prevent chronic diseases. Multi-year initiatives like those sponsored by the funders of the California Convergence Partnership* have yielded lessons that can inform the success of Prevention and Wellness-funded projects.

Support localities to implement community-based wellness initiatives

To mitigate the challenges of implementing community-based prevention and wellness efforts, locales will require opportunities for training, development, technical support, and guidance. Current and past efforts can help the state anticipate needs and provide relevant support.

Integrate health and prevention benchmarks across government sectors

All sectors of government can use a health lens to inform decision-making and no government entity should make decisions counter to the health and well-being of Californians. To maximize ARRA's Prevention and Wellness Fund, all state departments must identify opportunities to advance their respective mandates in ways that also prevent disease and promote health. Opportunities for Transportation, Labor, Housing and Community Development, and the Department of Education have been described above.

Train a health workforce skilled at community-based prevention

Nationally, ARRA provides \$500 million for health workforce development and training. A health workforce prepared to address 21st-century challenges in health equity and chronic disease prevention will be knowledgeable about community-based prevention initiatives, injury and disease prevention, and effective methods for achieving equitable health outcomes. The Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development will likely play a role in supporting health workforce development and this should not be limited to after-the-fact patient services, but should intentionally expand the definition of health workforce to include all of the institutions, programs, decisions, and infrastructure that affect health behaviors and outcomes.

* The California Convergence project is bringing together the grantees of the national Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership, including The California Endowment, Kaiser Permanente, The Kresge Foundation, Nemours, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), along with grantees of the California Department of Health Services. California Convergence was launched to promote learning, synergy and collaboration among more than 40 communities that are at the cutting edge of promoting policies to create healthy food and physical activity environments.

Conclusion

Governor Schwarzenegger and the legislature have the opportunity to leverage federal dollars to fund health-promoting infrastructure that will serve the state long into the future. Stimulus funds represent a much needed down-payment toward the vision for a healthy California. With rising health care costs, soaring unemployment rates, and an extraordinary budgetary situation, California needs to identify shovel-ready projects and ready-to-go programs which can yield long-term results. Realizing the vision for a healthy California starts with directing stimulus dollars to projects and programs that will promote health, equity, and safety; create ongoing jobs; and ensure a sustainable environment—especially in communities that can benefit most. Each sector—transportation, housing and community development, labor, social services, health and human services, and education—has a vital role to play in ensuring that stimulus dollars make the vision for a healthy California come true.

The **STRATEGIC ALLIANCE FOR HEALTHY FOOD AND ACTIVITY ENVIRONMENTS** (Strategic Alliance) is a network of diverse advocates in California committed to the vision of healthy community environments. Since 2001, the Strategic Alliance has been shifting the debate on nutrition and physical activity to one that examines corporate and government practices and the role of the environment in shaping eating and activity behaviors. The Alliance works to benefit the health and wellness of all California residents by promoting equitable environmental, community-based solutions and institutional and government policies and practices that support healthy eating and activity.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about these recommendations or the Strategic Alliance for Healthy Food and Activity Environments, Manal Aboelata, MPH, at 323-296-5750 or visit our website at www.eatbettermovemore.org

THE ALLIANCE STEERING COMMITTEE: The California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness Program (CANFit); California Center for Public Health Advocacy; California Food Policy Advocates; California Pan Ethnic Health Network; California Park & Recreation Society; California Project LEAN; California WIC Association; Child Care Food Program Roundtable; Latino Health Access; Partnership for the Public's Health; PolicyLink; Prevention Institute; Samuels & Associates, Inc

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