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INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCES MAJOR EXPANSION OF INDUSTRY CAMPAIGN TO COMBAT OBESITY

Major California Health Groups and Employers Join Effort to Implement Healthy Worksite Vending Policy

Oakland - Today, almost 7 million Californians will be able to choose healthy snacks at their worksites and healthcare facilities thanks to Integrated Healthcare Association's (IHA) healthy vending machine campaign. In response to the obesity epidemic afflicting 67% of Californians and linked to two-thirds of deaths in the state, ten additional IHA member organizations will make at least half the products in their onsite vending machines healthy snacks and beverages, adding approximately 150,000 employees at 60 worksites who will benefit from IHA's worksite campaign to address obesity. All of California's major commercial health plans are now supporting the program, in addition to hospitals, health systems, and physician groups throughout the state. Additionally, 6.5 million Kaiser health plan members will have access to healthy food and beverage choices in vending machines at 310 California facilities.

Today's announcement adds Aetna, Blue Shield of California, CIGNA HealthCare of California, Glendale Adventist Medical Center, John Muir/Mt. Diablo Health System, Kaiser Permanente of Northern and Southern California, Santa Clara Family Health Plan, Sante Health System, Sharp HealthCare, and Stanford University to the list of ten IHA member organizations who initially joined the IHA campaign on healthy vending alternatives in March. (Aetna will pilot the program at their West Region headquarters.)

This means that total participation in the healthcare industry initiative will affect approximately 207,000 employees, 6.5 million Kaiser healthcare members, and involve more than 1200 vending machines at approximately 500 sites throughout California.

The healthy vending policy will apply to the employees of the 20 supporting IHA member organizations, as patients don't usually have access to vending machines. However, Kaiser's adoption of the program will affect its health plan members as well.

"This program is a positive step forward in dealing with one of the environmental factors contributing to the increasing prevalence of obesity in California and the nation, and will help with the daily choices people make. It will be complex to implement due to our size – 635 vending machines – but complements Kaiser Permanente's multi-pronged approach to promoting Healthy Eating, Active Living, including programs such as Farmer's Markets at many of our medical centers," according to Sharon Levine, MD, Associate Executive Director, The Permanente Medical Group, Kaiser Permanente, Northern California.

The program goal is to offer choice and encourage healthy behavior change in small bites. Fruit and water will be available alongside candy bars and chips with at least half the vending options lower in saturated fat, sugar, and sodium and free of trans fats. The vending snack choices are based on specific, well-established nutrition guidelines.

Blue Shield of California's Senior Vice President of Network Management, David Joyner, sums it up: "This is an opportunity to improve the health of our own employees and address a public health issue that affects the cost of health care and doing business in California. As health care companies and employers, we'd like to lead by example."

Major business and health trade groups, including the Pacific Business Group on Health (PBGH), the California Hospital Association, the California Medical Association, and the California Association of Physician Groups, have recently announced their support for the healthy vending initiative. "PBGH is endorsing this because it tracks so closely with the interests of our members in promoting healthy lifestyles. Employers are increasingly understanding that an ounce of prevention really is worth a pound of cure," according to

Peter Lee, President and CEO of PBGH. PBGH, a business coalition of 50 industry and public sector employers, represents more than 3 million employees.

IHA, a statewide health leadership group that works to improve healthcare quality through collaboration and innovation, decided to focus on obesity following a leadership summit with state experts. Numerous studies document the impact of obesity on the cost and quality of life: obesity costs California employers and employees billions of dollars each year in direct and indirect expenses; it is linked to serious chronic illness including heart attack, stroke, and diabetes, and one third of premature deaths are related to poor nutrition and lack of activity.

“Employee excitement has exceeded our expectations and has been contagious,” according to Donald Rebhun, M.D., of HealthCare Partners, one of 10 IHA members who began implementing the healthy vending policy earlier this year. He says the policy has “ignited a new dialogue among staff, including doctors, leading to employee ideas for new programs and even contests to achieve a healthy weight.” Rebhun also notes they have not seen any difference in vendor revenue by switching to healthier products at the worksite.

“IHA serves a catalyst role, and we’re gratified with the response of California’s health and business sector to this initiative,” says Executive Director Tom Williams. IHA member organizations are also asking their customers to support the healthy vending policy.

The ten major California health care organizations and IHA members that agreed to implement the policy last March include: Blue Cross of California, PacifiCare Health System, Health Net, HealthCare Partners Medical Group, Hill Physicians (Primed Management Consulting Services), Camino Medical Group, L.A. Care Health Plan, Keenan Associates, Monarch HealthCare (Physician WebLink) and Sutter Health. PacifiCare and Health Net also are considering nationwide implementation of the policy.

IHA has identified three action steps to address obesity. Besides the healthy vending program, IHA advocates collecting and publicly reporting surgical outcomes on bariatric surgery in California. The rise in obesity has sparked a surge in the procedure. IHA

administers the groundbreaking Pay for Performance (P4P) program, which recognizes and rewards physician groups for performance in clinical quality, patient experience, and investment in IT to support patient care. P4P is considering ways to incorporate obesity as a performance measure.

IHA (www.iha.org) is a statewide collaborative leadership group of California health plans, physician groups, and healthcare systems, plus academic, consumer, purchaser, pharmaceutical and technology representatives that promotes quality improvement, accountability, and affordability for all California consumers through special projects, policy innovation, and education.

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