



September 30, 2004

California Performance Review Commission  
Office of the Governor  
Constituent Affairs  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: THE CALIFORNIA PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND THE IMPERATIVE OF PREVENTION**

Commissioners:

I am the Executive Director of Prevention Institute, a California-based national non-profit center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. I am registering my comments regarding the California Performance Review (CPR) and its glaring lack of focus on the *prevention* of disease, intentional injury, and unintentional injury. The CPR's intent to improve the State's performance and accountability to better meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond is worthwhile and timely. Aligning the vision, goals, and functions of California's massive state bureaucracy, while also aspiring to create greater efficiency and effectiveness and ensure excellent customer service are all laudable goals. However, the CPR fails to fulfill its spirit and promise by ignoring the potential of prevention efforts to fundamentally alter the conditions that are draining precious resources from California. If prevention is not prioritized, available resources will once again prove insufficient to meet the State's challenge at hand. While individual leaders within the State's various departments may attempt to integrate prevention in the implementation of the CPR, we cannot depend on this possibility. Therefore, it is critical that the CPR Commission take bold steps to embed prevention into the very missions of all of the State's relevant departments and invest in prevention, thereby saving thousands of lives, improving quality of life, and conserving government resources. A focus on prevention is also in the State's economic interest, since a strong economy demands a healthy workforce.

Prevention, whether in addressing tobacco use, teen pregnancy, traffic crashes, or violence, is a proven strategy for improving health, education, and other outcomes. An estimated 50% of all deaths in the U.S. are preventable. While the leading causes of death in the U.S. are heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, unintentional injuries, and diabetes, the *actual causes* of these deaths are tobacco, poor diet/lack of exercise, alcohol, infectious agents, pollutants/toxins, firearms, sexual behavior, motor vehicles, and illicit drug use.<sup>i</sup> The vast majority of the actual causes of death are due to lifestyle and environmental factors that are preventable. In the area of traffic safety, for instance, there are numerous examples of prevention success. From 1975 to 2001 it is estimated that 147,000 lives were saved through the use of seatbelts, over 20,000 lives were saved through minimum drinking age laws, and over 5,000 children's lives were saved through the use of child restraints.<sup>ii</sup> These successes demonstrate that well-designed prevention efforts could have reduced or eliminated the estimated 2.8 million injuries and over 42,000 deaths in the U.S.

from motor vehicle crashes in 2003.<sup>iii</sup> Similar examples exist in a range of areas, from obesity and diabetes prevention to youth violence and delinquency prevention, with successes and impact growing as the knowledge and practice base in prevention has expanded over the last few decades.

California has made remarkable achievements in prevention, including decreasing rates of smoking and preventing violence in different locales. The benefits gained from these efforts have improved the quality of life for Californians and reduced expenditures associated with after-the-fact treatment and incarceration. These gains have been realized through the visionary actions of key leaders and the tireless work of countless public agency staff, community-based organizations, and concerned individuals. California has a tremendous foundation of leadership, innovation, and multi-sector partnerships upon which to expand prevention initiatives. Yet, despite their proven resource-effectiveness, prevention efforts are infrequently given priority, and are often the first initiatives to be reduced or eliminated in any attempt to conserve fiscal resources. For prevention to be effective, its practice must be central and sustained, not tangential and sporadic. Therefore, to ensure the consistent, comprehensive, and sustainable implementation of prevention, it must be embedded into the very missions of all of the State's relevant departments.

Moreover, not only do strategic investments in prevention stave off premature mortality, injury, and illness, it also pays off. A recent study conducted for the State of Washington demonstrated that certain prevention and early intervention programs for youth resulted in cost savings for taxpayers.<sup>iv</sup> In another study conducted by the RAND Corporation, the cost effectiveness of the Quantum Opportunities Program, a comprehensive after-school program implemented in four cities, was compared with that of California's "Three Strikes" law. It concluded that, per dollar spent, the after-school program was over five times more cost-effective at preventing serious crimes than "Three Strikes."<sup>v</sup> The benefits of investing in prevention accrue not only to those agencies and departments directly involved in delivering health and medical services, but to the entire community, most especially police and other public safety departments, and the businesses that are increasingly vested in having a healthy and safe workforce. A vibrant workforce is critical for California's economy to regain its strength and flourish. Yet businesses find themselves faced with skyrocketing healthcare costs and a growing percentage of working people whose productivity is diminished by health impairments, chronic diseases, and disabilities. More and more companies are recognizing that integrating prevention into their business practices can reduce healthcare costs and decrease lost productivity, and are adding fitness programs, on-site fitness centers, and other prevention-oriented programs.

The opportunities to invest in proven prevention strategies are numerous, and public support for such efforts continues to grow. Yet the CPR lacks the vision and concrete steps to capitalize on the possibilities. For example, in the section of the recommendations specifically dealing with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), six goals are articulated. Glaringly absent from this list is any mention of prevention. In fact, the first and only goal that deals with public health functions is framed in a way that solely emphasizes response to outbreaks of disease and bioterrorism. It implies that our highest public health office could only be concerned with responses after the fact – after something bad has happened. The absence of any mention of public health's role in prevention is a major oversight. This omission is also found in the recommendations for the Behavioral Health and Social Services Divisions. DHHS must promote the replication of prevention programs that have been proven effective in saving lives, reducing disability, and providing a solid return on investment. This is equally true for the proposed Public Health and Homeland Security Department, which includes victim services, but neglects to emphasize prevention efforts, which

have been effective in addressing youth and community violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault, and are integral for public safety.

Furthermore, health and well-being is determined by much more than traditional healthcare or even public health services. Therefore, the need for a focus on prevention extends to many other departments such as the proposed Food and Agriculture, Infrastructure, and Labor and Economic Development Departments. Each of these departments has a significant and vital role to play in promoting and protecting the health and well-being of all Californians. These roles should be recognized and articulated, and cross-departmental strategies encouraged.

CPR represents an unprecedented opportunity to fundamentally alter the conditions that are draining precious resources from California. By embedding prevention into the missions of all of the State's relevant departments and throughout the recommendations, the CPR can fulfill its promise of achieving enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of government, while also realizing greater health and well-being for all residents, and strengthening the economy. California is poised to be a model of prevention for the nation, and we urge you to seize this historic opportunity.

Since 1997, Prevention Institute has provided training, technical assistance, research, and evaluation for coalitions, community-based organizations, government agencies, foundations, and others. I would be pleased to share additional information and resources with the CPR Commission. A significant amount of information on prevention can also be found on our website at [www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org). Thank you.

Sincerely,

Larry Cohen  
Executive Director

CC: Kimberly Belshé, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency  
Dr. Richard J. Jackson, State Public Health Officer, California Department of Health and Human Services  
Jim Mayer, Executive Director, Little Hoover Commission

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<sup>i</sup> McGinnis JM, WH Foege. 1993. Actual causes of death in the United States. *JAMA*, 270:2207-2213.

<sup>ii</sup> *Overview: Traffic Safety Facts 2001*. 2002. Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Center for Statistics and Analysis, US Dept of Transportation.

<sup>iii</sup> *DOT Announces Historic Low Highway Fatality Rate in 2003*. 2004. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Center for Statistics and Analysis, US Dept of Transportation. Available at:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2004&filename=pr35-04.html>. Accessed August 11, 2004.

<sup>iv</sup> S. Aos, R. Lieb, et. al. 2004. Benefits and Costs of Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Youth. Olympia, Washington, Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Available at <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-07-3901.pdf>. Accessed on September 28, 2004.

<sup>v</sup> Greenwood, PW, et. al. 1996. Diverting Children from a Life of Crime: Measuring Costs and Benefits. Santa Monica, CA, RAND Corporation.