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Combs Presents Updated Analysis of Obesity Costs — Comptroller Urges Investment in Prevention and Intervention Initiatives

(AUSTIN) — Obesity costs Texas businesses **\$9.5 billion** annually, and if the obesity rate and the cost of health care continue to increase as projected, the cost to businesses could reach **\$32.5 billion** per year by 2030, Texas Comptroller Susan Combs said today. The price tag for obesity is almost triple an estimate Combs released in 2007.

“Texas businesses are paying an enormous price for obesity, diverting dollars that could be invested in business expansion, job creation and building a strong Texas economy,” Combs said.

Combs released a new report, *Gaining Costs, Losing Time: The Obesity Crisis in Texas*, that uses updated data and new research by leading health economists to re-calculate the cost to Texas employers of obesity-related health care, absenteeism, decreased productivity and disability.

Gaining Costs, Losing Time estimates Texas employers paid **\$4 billion** in direct health insurance costs in 2009. Indirectly, obesity cost employers an estimated **\$5.4 billion** in 2009, including \$1.6 billion for obesity-related absenteeism, \$3.5 billion for reduced work productivity and \$321.8 million for obesity-linked disability.

Two-thirds of adult Texans — 66.7 percent — were overweight or obese in 2009, higher than the national rate of 63.2 percent. Among Texas children aged 10 to 17, 20.4 percent are obese, compared to 16.4 percent of U.S. children. Obese kids have an 80 percent chance of staying obese their entire lives.

Gaining Costs, Losing Time identifies successful efforts to combat obesity through workplace wellness programs; higher nutritional standards for school meals; increased emphasis on physical education and nutrition awareness in public schools; and community-based initiatives to help children and adults lose weight and achieve healthier lifestyles. The report includes recommendations to encourage and invest in obesity prevention and intervention programs.

“Exciting programs and initiatives are occurring throughout Texas, and I applaud those who are in the forefront of the fight against obesity,” Combs said. “My goal is to expand proven successful programs through targeted interventions in areas that are at high risk of obesity. A common thread of successful programs is the coordinated and sustained efforts of community organizations, schools, parents and government.”

(more)

Combs recommends that the Legislature increase physical education requirements in Texas middle schools and high schools.

“Among our high school seniors, only 8 percent of girls and 9 percent of boys are considered physically fit,” Combs said.

Other recommendations in the report include encouraging restaurants to list calories and nutrition content on menu items, encouraging more farmer’s markets to accept the Lone Star card to pay for fresh produce and encouraging the federal government to make some unhealthy foods ineligible to be purchased with food stamps.

“The obesity epidemic presents our most pressing public health challenge, threatening our overall well-being and economic vitality,” Combs said. “We must invest in the well-being of our children and foster healthier habits in our schools, communities and workplaces to create a healthier future for all Texans.”

Combs has been a leader in the fight against obesity for more than a decade. As Texas Agriculture Commissioner, she fought successfully for more nutritious foods in public school cafeterias and restrictions on candy and soda in campus vending machines.

Gaining Costs, Losing Time: The Obesity Crisis in Texas can be found on the Comptroller’s website at <http://www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/obesitycost/>



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