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National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month is Opportunity to Support Breastfeeding

President Obama has proclaimed September as National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. This proclamation comes at a time when approximately 17% of our nation's children---12.5 million children between the ages of 2 and 18---are obese. The prevalence of obesity among U.S. children has almost tripled since 1980. Most overweight and obese children become obese adults, increasing their risk of a host of adverse psychosocial and physical conditions.

The United States Lactation Consultant Association (USLCA) shares the President's concern and applauds efforts to curb this troubling trend. First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! expands access to nutritious food, promotes physical activity, and seeks to help families make healthy decisions. This year's Hunger Free Kids Act released new rules to improve the nutritional value of school-based meals.

While these efforts are valuable and necessary, USLCA reminds the public that breastfeeding is the only proven preventative for childhood obesity. Breastfeeding significantly reduces the likelihood of developing childhood obesity, with the protection increasing as the duration of breastfeeding increases. In fact, according to a major analysis, breastfeeding for 9 months reduces the odds of a child becoming overweight by more than 30%. Intensity of breastfeeding also matters, with exclusive breastfeeding having a greater protective effect than combining breastfeeding with formula feeds. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months, and continued breastfeeding with additional complementary foods for at least the first year of life.

The risk of childhood obesity is higher in low-income areas, mirroring the risk of infant feeding with non-human milk. Transforming the culture so as to promote and support breastfeeding is an important public health initiative. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding outlines specific ways for employers, communities, hospitals and health care providers, and families to create an environment enabling mothers to succeed in breastfeeding. Additionally, the Affordable Care Act requires insurance coverage for breastfeeding counseling services, increasing access to this essential health benefit.

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) can help mothers achieve their breastfeeding goals, affording both mother and child the healthful benefits of breastfeeding, including obesity prevention. IBCLCs are members of the healthcare team with specialized skills

in breastfeeding management and care. IBCLCs have passed a rigorous examination and have logged hundreds or thousands of hours supporting breastfeeding mothers and babies. For more information about IBCLCs or to locate an IBCLC in your area visit www.uslca.org. For more information about the relationship between breastfeeding and the prevention of childhood obesity, visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.