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September 21, 2018

Robert R. Redfield, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Director Redfield:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to urge the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to reinstate the eating disorders assessment questions as part of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS).

Eating disorders remain a serious health issue in the United States, with more than 30 million Americans experiencing eating disorders in their lifetime. Also, eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental health illness and intersect in complex ways with increased risk for suicide, substance abuse, depression, obesity, and other potential short and long-term medical complications. These illnesses often emerge in youth and recovery is more likely with early intervention. It is therefore essential that the CDC collect current, accurate data on eating disorders to advance our understanding of the problem and encourage the development of treatment strategies and primary preventive measures or preventive interventions.

For two decades the CDC recognized the importance of mandatory surveillance of eating disorders under the YRBSS. However, the CDC removed the mandatory eating disorders surveillance questions in 2015. This has left researchers and public health experts without adequate data to determine the current extent of the problem throughout our nation, including highly affected populations such as children, Native Americans, and veterans. Without national surveillance data, it is extremely difficult to understand the prevalence of this serious health issue and the populations at risk, and to develop effective prevention and treatment programs.

The AMA appreciates the CDC's consideration of our comments. If you have any questions or want to discuss this issue further, please contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President for Federal Affairs, at margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org, or by calling 202-789-7409.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

James L. Madara, MD