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American Heart Month, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

For more than half of this century, diseases of the heart and blood vessels, collectively called cardiovascular diseases, have been our Nation's most serious health problem. Last year, these diseases claimed 973,000 lives, and they caused serious and sometimes permanent illness or disability in still more Americans. Within this family of diseases, the leading killers remained coronary heart disease, which accounted for 524,000 deaths, and strokes, which accounted for 148,000 deaths.

Grim though these statistics may be, other statistics indicate that a corner may have been turned in 1965. Since then, mortality rates for all cardiovascular diseases, and especially for the two leading killers—coronary heart disease and stroke—have been moving steadily downward. For example, since 1972, mortality rates for all cardiovascular diseases combined have fallen by 34 percent, and those for coronary heart disease and stroke have declined by 35 percent and 50 percent respectively.

One major reason for the decline in cardiovascular mortality rates is that more and more Americans are modifying their habits in the direction of better cardiovascular health. Research has identified factors that increase vulnerability to premature coronary heart disease or stroke, and millions of Americans are acting on that knowledge to eliminate or ameliorate the risk factors that can be modified. These include high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and sedentary living. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, encouraged by the success of its National High Blood Pressure Education Program, has now launched similar programs against two other major risk factors: cigarette smoking and elevated blood cholesterol.

Today, the person stricken with a heart attack has a much better chance of surviving the acute episode, thanks to continued improvement in diagnosis and treatment. More and more of the stricken are reaching the hospital alive, thanks to better recognition of ominous symptoms, widespread teaching of cardiopulmonary resuscitation by the American Red Cross and the American Heart Association, and better-equipped emergency vehicles with better-trained crews.

Many individuals and organizations have contributed to the past four decades of progress against cardiovascular diseases. However, two organizations—the federally funded National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and the privately supported American Heart Association—have been in the forefront of this national effort. Since 1948, the two have worked in close cooperation to foster and support increased basic and clinical research in the cardiovascular field, to train new research scientists and clinicians, and to participate in a wide variety of community service and public and professional information activities. Through their efforts, Americans have become more aware of what they can do to live healthier lives.

Much has already been accomplished, but much more remains to be done. Recognizing the need for all Americans to take part in the continuing battle against heart disease, the Congress, by Joint Resolution approved December 30, 1963 (77 Stat. 843; 36 U.S.C. 169b), has requested the President to issue annually a proclamation designating February as "American Heart Month."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the month of February 1988 as American Heart Month. I invite all appropriate government officials and the American people to join with me in reaffirming our commitment to finding new or improved ways to prevent, detect, and control cardiovascular diseases.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-first day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan