

Prevention Issue Brief- Executive Summary

Prevention and Chronic Care Management Advisory Council
Iowa Department of Public Health

October 2010

The dramatic growth of chronic diseases is a huge burden to America. An alarming 75 cents of every health care dollar is spent on chronic diseases, and they account for 7 out of every 10 deaths.¹ If this problem is ignored, the cost of treating chronic conditions such as diabetes, cancer, and obesity could overwhelm American health care. But improving preventive care and keeping people healthier is one of the most effective ways to reduce health care costs and is a major focus of health care reform.

Levels of Prevention

Level	Definition	Examples
Primary Prevention	Health promotion activities that prevent the actual occurrence of a specific illness or disease.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Immunizations• Health education about prevention illness• Hand washing
Secondary Prevention	Promotes early detection of disease, thereby increasing opportunities for interventions to prevent the progression of the disease.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Screening for a specific disease• Treatment of hypertension to prevent complications• Initiating dietary changes to prevent overweight/obesity
Tertiary Prevention	Directed towards recovery or rehabilitation of a disease or condition after the disease has been developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Referring someone who had a stroke to rehabilitation• Educating someone how to manage their diabetes

Health Benefits of Prevention

America's current health care system is set up to focus on treating people once they become sick. Some experts describe this as "sick care" instead of health care. The country will never be able to contain health care costs until we start focusing on how to prevent people from getting sick in the first place, putting an emphasis on improving the choices we make that affect our risk for preventable diseases. Experts widely agree that three of the most important factors that influence our health are:

- 1) **Physical activity**
- 2) **Nutrition**
- 3) **Whether or not we smoke**

CDC estimates that eliminating these three risk factors would prevent:

- **80% of heart disease and stroke**
- **80% of type 2 diabetes**
- **40% of cancer¹**

Return on Investment

A small strategic investment in disease prevention could result in significant savings in U.S. health care costs. A recent report¹ finds that an investment of \$10 per person per year in proven community-based programs to increase physical activity, improve nutrition, and prevent tobacco use could save America more than \$16 billion annually within 5 years. **This is a return on investment of \$5.60 for every \$1.** The report focused on disease prevention programs that do not require medical care and target communities. Examples of these programs include providing increased access to affordable nutritious foods, increasing sidewalks and parks in communities, and raising tobacco tax rates.²

Iowa could save \$214,300,000 in 10-20 years by making this \$10 per person per year investment. That is a return on investment of more than 6 to 1.²

Physical Activity and Healthy Eating

Chronic illnesses caused by obesity can be avoided by living a healthy lifestyle through nutritional and portion-controlled eating habits and regular exercise. On the other hand, unhealthy eating habits and physical inactivity are the two main risk factors for major chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.

Over 67% of adult Iowans are overweight or obese, up from 55% in 1995.

Healthy People 2010 states that around 75 percent of Americans do not eat enough fruit, over half do not eat enough vegetables, and 64 percent consume too much saturated fat. Low fruit and vegetable consumption and high saturated fat intake are associated with coronary heart disease, some cancers, and diabetes.³

Regular physical activity is essential for a healthy life. Physically inactive people are two times as likely to develop coronary heart disease as people who engage in regular physical activity. Thus physical inactivity causes almost as much risk for heart disease as cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, or a high cholesterol level, but is more prevalent than any of these other risk factors.

The CDC developed a report "[Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States](#)" which contains 24 recommended obesity prevention strategies (below) focusing on environmental and policy level change initiatives that can be implemented by local governments and school districts to promote healthy eating and active living.⁴

Strategies to Promote the Availability of Affordable Healthy Food and Beverages

1. Increase availability of healthier food & beverage choices in public service venues
2. Improve availability of affordable healthier food & beverage choices in public service venues
3. Improve geographic availability of supermarkets in underserved areas
4. Provide incentives to food retailers to locate in and/or offer healthier food & beverage choices in underserved areas
5. Improve availability of mechanisms for purchasing foods from farms
6. Provide incentives for the production, distribution, & procurement of foods from local farms

Strategies to Support Healthy Food and Beverage Choices

7. Restrict availability of less healthy foods & beverages in public service venues
8. Institute smaller portion size options in public service venues
9. Limit advertisements of less healthy foods & beverages
10. Discourage consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages

Strategy to Encourage Breastfeeding

11. Increase support for breastfeeding

Strategies to Encourage Physical Activity or Limit Sedentary Activity Among Children and Youth

12. Require physical education in schools
13. Increase the amount of physical activity in PE programs in schools
14. Increase opportunities for extracurricular physical activity
15. Reduce screen time in public service venues

Strategies to Create Safe Communities That Support Physical Activity

16. Improve access to outdoor recreational facilities
17. Enhance infrastructure supporting bicycling
18. Enhance infrastructure supporting walking
19. Support locating schools within easy walking distance of residential
20. Improve access to public transportation
21. Zone for mixed-use development
22. Enhance personal safety in areas where persons are or could be physically active
23. Enhance traffic safety in areas where persons are or could be physically active

Strategy to Encourage Communities to Organize for Change

24. Participate in community coalitions or partnerships to address obesity

Obesity Prevention

Obesity rates in the U.S. have increased dramatically over the last 30 years, and obesity is now considered an epidemic in America.⁵

There is great opportunity to reverse this trend and save nearly \$200 billion in health care costs by enacting common-sense reforms. The *Partnership to Fight Chronic Diseases* proposes the following five recommendations, with examples of potential policy solutions, to address the obesity challenge:

If nothing is done to tackle the obesity crisis, by 2018:

- 103 million American adults (43% of the population) will be considered obese.
- US spending on health care costs caused by obesity will quadruple to \$344 billion.
- Obesity will account for more than 21% of health care spending.⁵

Recommendations	Potential Policy Solutions
Remove barriers and empower Americans to take control of their health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include obesity counseling as a preventative service • Reinstate physical education and require school lunches to meet nutritional standards • Ensure that all Americans have access to a place where they can be physically active and purchase healthy foods by supporting tax, grant and subsidy programs that achieve these goals
Educate Americans to view obesity as a serious medical condition that increases risk for other health problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use public awareness campaigns to empower providers to treat obesity as a medical condition • Develop recommendations for approaching the subject of overweight/obesity in a clinical setting
Ensure that fear about the stigma of obesity does not eclipse the need to combat it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support educational workshops that give Americans guidance in preventing and treating obesity • Provide support systems for patients and family members to adhere to treatments for obesity
Redesign our health care system to treat obesity like a preventable medical condition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay for "extra" care like weight loss counseling • Reimburse for nutritionists and other specialists • Increase coverage of comprehensive primary care to include obesity monitoring and prevention
Engage employers and communities to get them invested in promoting wellness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer tax credits to employers that offer wellness benefits and encourage health • Ensure that programs are voluntary, easy to access and have a well-designed and well-communicated structure and series of benefits • Provide incentives and funding through community health centers (including school-based centers)

[* Click here to view the full Prevention Issue Brief.](#)

Resources

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2009/apr/08_0236.htm

² Prevention for a Healthier America, <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/prevention08/Prevention08.pdf>

³ Healthy People 2020, <http://www.healthypeople.gov/>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5807.pdf>

⁵ Partnership to Fight Chronic Diseases, http://www.fightchronicdisease.org/pdfs/PFCDPolicyRecommendationsonObesity_FINAL_000.pdf