

A HEALTHIER AMERICA: 10 TOP PRIORITIES FOR PREVENTION

Recognizing the Relationship Between Health and U.S. Economic Competitiveness

WHY IS POOR HEALTH A THREAT TO U.S. ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS?

Health Care Costs Are Undermining Business Profits and Successes:

- Poor health is putting the nation's economic security in jeopardy. The skyrocketing costs of health care threaten to bankrupt American businesses, causing some companies to send jobs to other countries where costs are lower.
- U.S. health care costs exceed \$2 trillion annually, nearly 3 times more than in 1990, over 8 times more than in 1980.²
- More than one-quarter of health care costs are related to obesity, overweight, and physical inactivity due to associated health problems including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and some forms of cancer.³
 - ▲ Health care costs of obese workers are up to 21 percent higher than non-obese workers.⁴
 - ▲ More than one quarter of U.S. health care costs are related to physical inactivity, overweight, and obesity.⁵
 - ▲ Obese and physically inactive workers also suffer from lower worker productivity, increased absenteeism, and higher workers' compensation claims.⁶
 - ▲ Obese employees, on average, submit twice as many workers compensation claims as normal weight employees, and these claims are far more expensive.⁷

- More than 20 percent of adult Americans currently smoke. Lifetime health care costs for individuals who smoke are \$17,500 higher than for those who do not smoke.⁸
- Workplace injuries annually cost U.S. employers \$46.8 billion — nearly \$1 billion per week — in direct costs (medical and lost wage payments). When indirect costs, such as overtime, training, lost productivity, are taken into account, costs to employers can climb to as much as \$291.6 billion each year.⁹

Keeping People Healthier is Crucial to Keeping Health Costs Down:

- Keeping the American workforce well helps American business remain competitive in the global economy, for example:
 - ▲ Caterpillar's Healthy Balance Program will save \$700 million by 2015.¹⁰
 - ▲ MetLife estimates a 2.52 return on investment from its fitness program, which costs about \$550,000 a year, a savings of about \$1.38 million per year. The percentage of MetLife employees who were previously considered at high cardiovascular risk has dropped from about 35 percent of a 200 person random sample to less than 10 percent.¹¹
 - ▲ Motorola's Wellness Program saves the company \$3.93 for every \$1 invested in wellness benefits.¹²

"IF WE CAN CREATE A HEALTH CARE PLAN THAT CONTAINS COSTS OR DRIVES THEM DOWN, THAT IMPROVES THE HEALTH OF THE EMPLOYEE AND EXTENDS THEIR LIFE, AND AVOIDS CATASTROPHIC ILLNESS AND DOESN'T COST THEM ANY MORE MONEY, WHY WOULD ANYONE QUARREL WITH THAT PLAN?"¹

-- SAFEWAY CEO, STEVEN BURD

MARCH 2008

PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.
PROTECTING PEOPLE.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF THE U.S. WORKFORCE?

- **Encourage Every Employer to Offer a Workplace Wellness Program.** Federal, state, and local governments must work with private employers and insurers to ensure that every working American has access to a workplace wellness program and preventive care benefits. Preventive benefits should also be extended to employees' families.
- **Promote Healthy Communities.** Businesses should support measures to ensure the communities where their employees and their families live are healthy, through advocating for safe, affordable recreation spaces, sidewalks, bike paths, healthy school policies, access to affordable healthy foods, and other

strong public health policies and services that help make healthy choices easy choices.

- **Improve Job Safety.** Federal agencies, including the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), should receive the funding they need to set and enforce workplace safety and health standards.
- **Support Smoke-Free Communities.** Businesses should adopt create smoke-free workplace policies and communities should support smoke-free laws and tobacco-taxes to encourage smoking cessation and reduce second-hand smoke.

ENDNOTES

- 1 V. Colliver. "Preventive Health Plan May Prevent Cost Increases: Safeway Program Includes Hot Line, Lifestyle Advice." *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 11, 2007.
- 2 KaiserEDU.org. "U.S. Health Care Costs: Background Brief." Kaiser Family Foundation. http://www.kaiseredu.org/topics_im.asp?imID=1&parentID=61&id=358 (accessed January 10, 2008).
- 3 K. Thorpe, et al. "Trends: The Impact Of Obesity On Rising Medical Spending." *Health Affairs* 4, (October 2004): 480-486.
- 4 E. Ostbye, et al. "Obesity and Workers' Compensation: Results from the Duke Health and Safety Surveillance System." *Archives of Internal Medicine* 167, no. 8, (2004):766-773.
- 5 L.H. Anderson, et al. "Health Care Charges Associated with Physical Inactivity, Overweight, and Obesity." *Preventing Chronic Disease* 2, no. 4, (October 2005):1-12.
- 6 S. Klarenbach, et al. "Population-Based Analysis of Obesity and Workforce Participation." *Obesity* 14, no. 5 (May 2006): 920-927.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. "Fact Sheet: Lifetime Health Costs of Smokers vs. Former Smokers vs. Nonsmokers." Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0277.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2008).
- 9 The Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety. "2006 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index." Liberty Mutual. <http://www.wausau.com/omapps/ContentServer?cid=1078452376750&pagename=wcmInter%2FDocument%2FShowDoc&c=Document>. (access January 28, 2008).
- 10 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Prevention Makes Common "Cents"*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003.
- 11 Business Roundtable. *Doing Well Through Wellness: 2006-07 Survey of Wellness Programs at Business Roundtable Member Companies*. Washington, D.C.: Business Roundtable, 2007. http://www.business-roundtable.org/pdf/Health_Retirement/BR_Doing_Well_through_Wellness_09192007.pdf (accessed October 9, 2007).
- 12 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Prevention Makes Common "Cents"*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003.

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