

A HEALTHIER AMERICA: 10 TOP PRIORITIES FOR PREVENTION

Managing the Changing Health Care Needs of Seniors

WHY ARE THE CHRONIC DISEASES OF AGING A THREAT TO OUR NATION'S HEALTH?

High Health Burden, High Financial Costs:

- By 2030, 20 percent of the U.S. population – 71 millions Americans – will be 65 or older. Aging-related diseases are projected to increase the country's health care costs by 25 percent during this time period.²
- 80 percent of America's seniors (people 65 and older) live with at least one chronic disease that could lead to premature death or disability.³

Many Health Problems Could Be Prevented, Delayed, or Better Managed:

- Many cases of chronic illnesses, particularly heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some forms of cancer, could be avoided or delayed with healthy lifestyle practices, such as regular physical activity, healthy eating, and avoiding tobacco use, and through screenings for early detection of cancer and other diseases, according to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁴

- There is growing evidence that Alzheimer's can be prevented or delayed through health lifestyles, physical activity, and "exercising" the brain by reading and staying socially active.
- Seniors with the flu are at higher risk for developing pneumonia as a complication, which can be lethal, particularly in older adults. Flu and pneumonia are currently the eighth leading cause of death in the United States. In 2004, over one million hospitalizations and 60,207 deaths were associated with people who died from pneumonia and there were over one million hospitalizations associated pneumonia.^{5,6}
- A recent study found that despite government recommendations, more than one-third of Americans aged 65 and over did not receive a flu shot.⁷
- Each year, between 360,000 and 480,000 older Americans sustain fall-related injuries, many of which could be prevented.⁸



"CHRONIC DISEASES EXACT A PARTICULARLY HEAVY HEALTH AND ECONOMIC BURDEN ON OLDER ADULTS DUE TO ASSOCIATED LONG-TERM ILLNESS, DIMINISHED QUALITY OF LIFE, AND GREATLY INCREASED HEALTH CARE COSTS. ALTHOUGH THE RISK OF DISEASE AND DISABILITY CLEARLY INCREASES WITH ADVANCING AGE, POOR HEALTH IS NOT AN INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCE OF AGING."¹

-- U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)

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**PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.
PROTECTING PEOPLE.**

HOW CAN WE KEEP SENIORS HEALTHIER?

■ **Promote Prevention.** Health care providers and insurers, community organizations, employers, and government should provide seniors with increased information about the importance of lifestyle changes, such as those related to diet and exercise, and the importance of getting routine screenings and physicals for early diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. Federal, state, and local governments should develop and implement a national strategy for promoting prevention activities.

■ **Expand Prevention Benefits Covered by Medicare and Provide More Information to Seniors About Existing Prevention Benefits.** Medicare should actively promote the range of prevention benefits

provided, including preventive screenings for heart disease, diabetes, and a number of other chronic diseases, and vaccinations for flu and pneumonia.

■ **Prioritize Vaccinating Seniors for Flu and Pneumonia.** Government health departments should strive to achieve the national goals of vaccinating 90 percent or more of seniors for flu and pneumonia.

■ **Increase Resources for Research.** The federal government should increase funding for the National Institute on Aging, and research efforts at the National Institutes of Health that investigate causes and cures of aging-related chronic diseases, including neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's and dementia.

ENDNOTES

1 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Healthy Aging for Older Adults." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/aging/> (accessed January 10, 2009).

2 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Merck Company Foundation. *The State of Aging and Health in America 2007*. Whitehouse Station, NJ: The Merck Company Foundation; 2007. http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/saha_2007.pdf

3 Ibid.

4 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Healthy Aging for Older Adults." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/aging/> (accessed January 10, 2009).

5 A. M. Minino, et al. "Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2004." *National Vital Statistics Report* 54, no. 19 (June 28, 2006).

6 C. J. DeFrances, et al. "2004 National Hospital Discharge Survey." *Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics* no. 371 (May 4, 2006).

7 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Prevalence Data, Nationwide (States and D.C.) - 2005 vs 2004, Immunization*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006. <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/brfss/display_c.asp?yr_c=2004&yr_t=2005&cat=IM&state=UB&bkby=20059912&qkey=4407&qtype=C&grp=0&SUBMIT2=Compare> (accessed October 30, 2006).

8 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Merck Company Foundation. *The State of Aging and Health in America 2007*. Whitehouse Station, NJ: The Merck Company Foundation; 2007. <http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/saha_2007.pdf>

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