



## Principles for Incorporating Public Health and Prevention into Health Care Reform

*America must provide quality, affordable health care to all. A strong public health system and public policies focused on prevention of disease and injury should be a cornerstone of a health reform plan.*

### **As Part of Health Care Reform, the Federal Government and Congress Should:**

- **Provide universal, quality coverage and access to give all Americans the opportunity to be as healthy as they can be.** All individuals and families should have a high level of services that protect, promote, and preserve their health, regardless of who they are or where they live. Coverage alone is insufficient. A reformed system must also assure access to care. Every American should have a “medical home” so they have access to coordinated care. State and local health departments often provide direct primary care and/or clinical preventive services to significant portions of the population, and therefore, need to be assured adequate funding streams if that role continues in a reformed system.
- **Invest in disease prevention to ensure that universal coverage is as cost-effective as possible. A reformed health care system must invest in both clinical and community-based prevention.**
  - The Partnership for Prevention has identified a series of clinical preventive measures that, if fully adopted by 90 percent of the population, could save 100,000 lives a year.
  - Trust for America’s Health (in collaboration with the New York Academy of Medicine) has identified a series of community level disease prevention programs for improving rates of physical activity, nutrition, and smoking cessation that could dramatically reduce the prevalence and/or severity of the most expensive chronic diseases in the U.S. today.
  - Based on an economic model developed by the Urban Institute, Trust for America’s Health found that an investment of \$10 per person per year in effective programs to improve physical activity and good nutrition and prevent smoking could result in more than \$16 billion savings in health care costs annually within 5 years. This is a return of \$5.60 for every \$1.
  - Many clinical preventive interventions require a strong community-level base to be effective. Community programs support the ability of individuals to follow medical advice and make healthy choices. For example, a doctor can encourage a

person to be more physically active, including writing a prescription for a person to get more exercise. However, unless a person has access to a safe, accessible place to engage in activity, they will not be able to “fill” this prescription.

- **Ensure that any health care financing system that is developed will include stable and reliable funding for core public health functions and clinical and preventive services.** A strong public health system is necessary to help promote better health, monitor the health of the country, and protect people from health threats that are beyond individual control, including bioterrorism, food safety inspection, and natural disasters. The nation must adequately fund federal, state, and local public health departments and programs to be able to fulfill their responsibility for protecting the health of the public. Public health needs a predictable, sustainable funding stream. Effective implementation of community-level prevention programs requires providing support to community organizations and coalitions who directly carry out this life-saving work.
- **Invest in bolstering the workforce and modernizing information systems for both health care and public health needs; if the public health system is not adequately supported, it will undermine the successes of health care reform efforts.** The public health system is facing a critical workforce shortage. Bolstering the public health workforce must be included in efforts to fortify the nation’s overall workforce of health professionals. Electronic health records (EHR) contain invaluable information about the health of Americans. While individual privacy must be vigilantly protected, aggregate information about the health of communities would provide public health officials with unprecedented levels of information to investigate health threats, such as being able to look for patterns of disease and connecting this information to possible causes. Public health officials should have access to EHRs for community-based research purposes while individual privacy is protected.
- **Extend quality assurance to community-based prevention in addition to direct medical care.** Since community-based prevention programs are important to maintaining the health of Americans, every effort should be made to ensure the country and communities are investing in the most effective programs possible. Community-based efforts should include performance measures and independent assessments to be able to understand cost-effectiveness and impact on health to better inform where to best invest resources.
- **Ensure that a reformed health care system will be prepared to react to and mitigate the consequences of a public health emergency.** The reformed health system must contribute to critical public health functions such as surveillance (integrating into other electronic health systems the mechanisms that identify new or urgent crises), surge capacity (by providing on-going financial support for health facilities to build the capacity to manage a sudden increase in demand), appropriate reimbursement for preparedness and response (so providers have the financial incentive and capacity to respond), and community resilience (supporting efforts to create stronger community ties between the reformed health care system and communities).

For more information, please contact Richard Hamburg, Director of Government Relations, 202-223-9876 or [rhamburg@tfah.org](mailto:rhamburg@tfah.org).