

ISSUE BRIEF

EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY

## A Healthier America: STRATEGIES TO MOVE FROM SICK CARE TO HEALTH CARE IN FOUR YEARS

America's health faces two possible futures. If we continue down our current track, we're resigning millions of Americans to health problems that could have been avoided, or we can invest in giving Americans the opportunity to be healthier while saving billions in health care costs and improving productivity.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Right now, more than half of Americans are living with one or more serious, chronic disease ranging from type 2 diabetes to cancer. Those rates are expected to increase significantly over the next two decades, particularly due to the obesity epidemic. In fact, today's kids are on track to be the first generation in U.S. history to live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents.

Preventing disease and improving health is the most effective, common sense way to reduce health care costs, but there's never been a strong national focus on prevention which will deliver the results the country needs to thrive and prosper.

Prevention delivers real value as a cost-effective way to keep Americans healthy and improve their quality of life. Everyone wins when we prevent disease rather than treating people after they get sick. Health care costs go down, our local neighborhoods are healthier and provide more economic opportunity, and people live longer, healthier and happier lives.

In *A Healthier America: Strategies to Move from Sick Care to Health Care in Four Years*, the Trust for America's Health (TFAH) identifies high-impact steps we can take to put prevention first in our health care system:

### ▲ Advance the Nation's Public Health System.

America's public health system is uniquely qualified to 1) diagnose the biggest,

most expensive health problems in a community; 2) identify the most effective strategies to improve health and lower disease rates; and 3) partner with members of the community, health care providers, a range of government agencies and the private sector to deliver results. Federal, state and local health departments need to adapt in response to the changing health care system, technology and priorities, and focus on those activities that they are uniquely qualified or positioned to do, and that they can do most efficiently.

Accomplishing this will require:

- **Adopting a set of "foundational" capabilities**, such as those defined by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and Transforming Public Health projects;
- **Restructuring federal public health programs** to better prioritize and coordinate prevention policies, so agencies most effectively and efficiently perform their functions, such as by realigning direct services and program management, and improving support for state and local health departments to be able to meet their core capabilities; and
- **Ensuring sufficient, sustained funding** that includes a mandate to demonstrate the ability to meet foundational capabilities in exchange for greater flexibility.

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PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.  
PROTECTING PEOPLE.

## ▲ Build Partnerships Within and Outside of the Health Field.

Public health departments play a central role as chief health strategists for communities, but cannot reach goals to improve their community's health on their own. To be effective in improving health in neighborhoods, workplaces and schools, strategies must involve a series of common-sense partnerships, including:

- **Partnering with health care payers and providers** to support preventive services at the doctor's office and give individuals the opportunity to take care of themselves and their families outside of the doctor's office: Prevention must be a high priority and fully integrated into reforming health care system models and how health care is financed.

Accomplishing this will require:

- **Ensuring insurance providers reimburse for effective prevention** approaches both inside and outside of the doctor's office;
- **Integrating community-based strategies into new health care models**, such as by expanding Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) into Accountable Care Communities (ACCs) or including public health within global health budget formulations, bringing together partners across sectors to provide a continuum of support for better health both inside and outside the doctor's office; and
- **Working with nonprofit hospitals to identify the most effective ways they can expand support for prevention through community benefit programs.**

- **Partnering with sectors beyond the health system** by working with education, transportation, housing and other areas to put common-sense measures into place that improve health while also supporting other goals: Where Americans live, learn, work and play have a major impact on health, and the public health system can work with other sectors to identify the most pervasive, highest-cost problems in their local communities and develop win-win strategies to achieve mutually beneficial results.

Accomplishing this will require:

- **Fully supporting the Prevention and Public Health Fund and expanding the Community Transformation Grant program** to support local communities to bring together a range of partners to address top health concerns using proven, evidence-based approaches;
- **Implementing the recommendations for each of the 17 agency partners in the National Prevention Strategy;** and
- **Encouraging all employers to provide effective, evidence-based workplace wellness programs.**

The *Healthier America* report provides additional detail on these strategies, a series of case studies showing these strategies in action and recommendations for 10 of TFAH's ongoing priority initiatives: the obesity epidemic; tobacco cessation; health and aging; addressing racial, ethnic and economic disparities; maternal and infant health; health and the environment; preventing injuries; infectious disease prevention; public health emergency preparedness; and food safety.

## ENDNOTES

1 Trust for America's Health. *Prevention for a Healthier America: Investments in Disease Prevention Yield Significant Savings, Stronger Communities*. Washington, D.C.: Trust for America's Health, 2008. <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/prevention08/> (accessed November 2012).

2 Trust for America's Health. *F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Health, 2012*. Washington, D.C.: Trust for America's Health, 2012. <http://healthyamericans.org/report/100/> (accessed November 2012).



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