

## A View from the Surgeon General: The National Prevention Strategy— Working Together to Become a More Healthy and Fit Nation

Regina M. Benjamin, MD, MBA, Surgeon General, U.S. Public Health Service

July 15, 2013

### Introduction

In this commentary, Dr. Regina Benjamin highlights accomplishments of the National Prevention Council, an unprecedented gathering of multiple federal departments and agencies whose policies and practices bear on health. Authorized under the Affordable Care Act, the Council has been inspired and led by Dr. Benjamin and has moved us closer to making health in all policies the norm rather than the exception. The Council highlights health as everyone's business and illustrates how all sectors of society can contribute to improving the social, environmental, and economic conditions that influence health outcomes. The new IOM Roundtable on Population Health Improvement, mentioned by Dr. Benjamin, follows a similar strategy of convening people from different sectors to inform and catalyze action on the array of factors that influence health. We, as citizens, all are indebted to Dr. Benjamin for her leadership as Surgeon General, and we could do nothing better to honor her service than to form and sustain the partnerships she calls for, to improve the health of our communities.

—Dr. Harvey V. Fineberg  
President of the Institute of Medicine

As Surgeon General, my vision to improve the health of our nation has been to focus on prevention. I have partnered with everyone, from nonprofits to companies big and small, to local, state, and tribal governments, as well as thousands of individuals, to help Americans understand that health occurs everywhere, not just in the doctor's office or the hospital.

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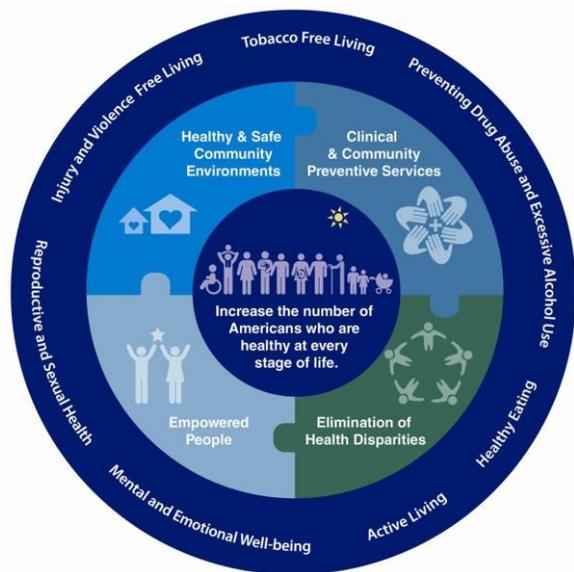
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I have the privilege of chairing the [National Prevention, Health Promotion, and Public Health Council](#), which was established by the Affordable Care Act and includes 20 heads of federal agencies, including the Departments of Transportation, Education, Agriculture, Labor, Defense, and Housing and Urban Development, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

With input from hundreds of stakeholders, the Council released the [National Prevention Strategy](#) in 2011. The Strategy serves as a roadmap to work with partners at local, national, and international levels to help bridge the gaps in health disparities and ultimately increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life (see the figure on page 2).

The National Prevention Strategy puts into action what we in the public health community have long known: Prevention is the foundation of public health, and prevention is the foundation of an effective



health system. As the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM’s) *For the Public’s Health: The Role of Measurement in Action and Accountability* noted, the National Prevention Council “offers an unprecedented opportunity for all sectors of government to come together” by engaging leaders from across the federal government to address the many factors that influence health.

Each year, the National Prevention Council releases a status update showing how we, as a nation, are progressing toward our goals. A broad range of federal, state, and local efforts contribute to improving health in the United States. The Council’s 2013 Annual Status Report shows positive trends in some leading health indicators. Among the highlights are decreases in

- youth ages 3 to 11 exposed to secondhand smoke;
- the number of adolescents who are current smokers;
- the rate of coronary heart disease deaths;
- stroke deaths; and
- overall cancer deaths.

The Council will continue to build on this progress.

The **Department of Veterans Affairs** is improving access to healthy food choices for the 8 million veterans enrolled in its health system by revamping menus, changing offerings in vending machines, and offering innovative nutritional education programs throughout its system.

The **Department of Defense’s Healthy Base Initiative** is a year-long demonstration project to improve the health of service members, families, and civilians by creating environments that enable the military community to make informed nutritional choices, increase physical activity, and promote healthy lifestyles.

The **Department of Housing and Urban Development** has encouraged smoke-free multifamily housing policies, resulting in implementation of these policies in more than 300 public housing agencies.

The **Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)** is promoting tobacco-free colleges and universities, with more than 1,100 campuses adopting such policies so far. HHS is also ensuring greater access to important preventive services, like cancer screenings and annual checkups, by implementing the Affordable Care Act’s requirement that insurers cover these services without additional out-of-pocket costs.

In June 2013, the **U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps**, with its more than 6,700 officers, became the first uniformed service to prohibit smoking and tobacco use while in uniform.

In order to create additional high-impact opportunities to advance prevention, I recently asked three new departments and agencies to join the National Prevention Council—the Department of the Interior, the Office of Personnel Management, and the General Services Administration. In addition, we have worked with partners across the country to make the National Prevention Strategy come alive at the state and community levels.

I congratulate the Institute of Medicine on convening a [Roundtable on Population Health Improvement](#), designed to bring together individuals and organizations from different areas to explore community action in transforming the conditions that influence health. The National Prevention Strategy recognizes that such partnerships are essential to achieving our goals, and success depends on working together with health professionals, state and local government, insurers, business and community leaders, consumer groups, the faith community, and individuals.

Becoming a more healthy and fit nation requires a vision and plan of action like the National Prevention Strategy and a dedicated group of leaders, like you, to lead the charge.

**Reference:**

IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2012. *For the public's health: The role of measurement in action and accountability*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, p. 69.

**Suggested citation:** Benjamin, R. M. *A view from the Surgeon General: The National Prevention Strategy—working together to become a more healthy and fit nation*. Institute of Medicine, Washington, DC.

<http://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/SurgeonGeneral>.