



Opportunities for Leadership: By Stakeholders in a Coalition

Ideas for Change: Beginning the Discussion March 20, 2008

WELLNESS

Good health – physical, mental and oral – is essential for a productive and vibrant America. A focus on wellness must be integrated into the lifecycle, from birth to death, and be encouraged in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

1. Invest in America's public health.

The public health system must be appropriately funded and supported to ensure that a focus on wellness and prevention touches all individuals – regardless of their insurance or employment status.

- Ensure federal and state funding of the nation's public health to assure that state and local communities have sufficient resources to protect and improve the public's health.
- Modernize America's public health information infrastructure to improve the connectivity and sharing of population-based health information.
- Expand public health programming on the underlying causes of disease – e.g., smoking, substance abuse, lipid control, exercise.
- Make better and more efficient use of our existing public health system.
- Identify and integrate the critical interfaces between public health and the clinical community to ensure optimal efficient and effective systems of care.

2. Promote healthy pregnancies and newborns.

Given mounting evidence that the earliest years greatly matter to children's growth and development, a focus on wellness must start during gestation and the years immediately following.

- Ensure insurance coverage of and access to early prenatal care, especially as a means to identify high-risk pregnancies.
- Use prenatal care visits as a key opportunity to teach health literacy and healthy behaviors.
- Encourage employers to provide workplace support for breastfeeding moms, such as reasonable break time, private locations, and refrigerators to store breast milk.
- Promote existing guidelines on the appropriate introduction of solid foods for infants.

3. Provide a national investment in school and community-based health.

Encouraging and supporting healthy behaviors from the start will be easier than altering unhealthy habits. School age children – from preschool through high school

– must be targeted for physical, mental, and oral health improvement through education, disease prevention, and early intervention.

- Increase federal funding for Early Head Start programs to support child development, nutrition counseling, and other support services for children, their parents, and families.
- Institute comprehensive school nurse programs to better educate children on wellness and prevention, supplement routine primary care and immunizations, identify at-risk children, and support behavioral and chronic care management in partnership with others.
- Increase the sale and promotion of fresh fruits and vegetables in school prepared lunches, and discourage the sale of unhealthy foods on school campuses.
- Reinstigate physical education requirements in schools. Provide federal grants to schools and communities for playgrounds, gyms, and other projects to improve child fitness levels.
- Increase federal matching funds available to states and counties for developing safe routes to school and parks around schools in at-risk communities.

4. *Create an objective, trusted source of consumer health information and education.*

The American public needs easy-to-understand, accessible, and comprehensive information to better understand how to best maintain their health.

- Create a single, publicly funded “go-to” website for consumer-friendly information on physical, mental, and oral health, with free, basic information and fact sheets on both healthy and unhealthy behaviors related to such things as nutrition, physical activity, tobacco and substance abuse, sleep, and stress.
- Promote the availability of “health flyers” in the community, such as in grocery stores, laundromats, public libraries, and places of worship, especially those situated in the neediest communities.

5. *Call for a national media campaign focusing on healthy lifestyles.*

The public needs to understand that everyone can become healthier – even individuals with acute or chronic medical conditions.

- Make wellness a public health priority at the national, state, and local level.
- Charge the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as state and local government entities, to help redefine public thoughts and perceptions about health.
- Develop easy-to-understand public service announcements, targeted to different age groups through different mediums, to “market the message” of remaining healthy.

6. *Provide support and coaching needed to change unhealthy behaviors.*

High-risk individuals should receive counseling and other support to reduce risky behaviors and adopt healthy ones. This support should be a joint effort among insurers, employers, providers, and others, and could be provided at a primary care site or be community-based.

- Enhance insurance coverage of both mental and dental health screenings and treatments.

- Promote insurance coverage of wellness activities, such as weight management programs and tobacco cessation counseling.
- Expand the development of community health centers as publicly-funded places of health promotion, chronic disease management, and physical activity.
- Offer tax incentives to businesses that promote employee wellness in the workplace.
- Limit public exposure to harmful substances – such as eliminating tobacco use in public areas, toxins in the workplace, and trans fats in food preparation.

7. *Provide incentives to encourage healthy choices and behaviors.*

Incentives should be created to encourage individuals, especially those at highest risk, to take primary ownership of their health.

- Reward individuals who work to maintain or improve their health – such as receiving recommended screenings, immunizations, and preventive services on a regular and timely basis; participating in disease, drug or self-management programs (i.e., smoking cessation, diabetes management, weight reduction); or complying with individual care plans. These rewards could include varying individual co-pays and deductibles, varying insurance premiums, or offering direct financial rewards to individuals such as tax credits or bonus payments.
- Encourage public and private health plans to offer at least one benefit package that includes rewards and incentives, including premium reductions, for engaging in healthy activities.

8. *Invest in the provision of primary care services.*

In order to better focus on wellness, disease prevention, and chronic care management, practitioners must be encouraged to choose primary care as a profession and to provide appropriate primary care at the right time and place.

- Enhance loan options and loan repayment programs to increase the supply and retention of primary care practitioners, especially in inner city and underserved areas.
- Appropriately fund the National Health Service Corps to help increase providers in underserved areas.
- Redistribute physician payments to increase reimbursement rates for cognitive (evaluation and management) services relative to intervention services.
- Explore whether Medicare Graduate Medical Education funds could be better targeted to promote an increase in the primary care workforce.
- Encourage enhanced payment for physicians, dentists, and other practitioners who improve access to patient care by offering extended office hours or open access scheduling.
- Modify reimbursement structures to support the development of patient-centered “health care homes.”

9. *Enhance health professions education to include a focus on wellness.*

Health professions education must help train the next generation of clinicians in keeping people healthy, diagnosing and treating chronic disease, and working together in teams to manage complex patients.

- Modify health professions education so that there is a focus on disease prevention.
- Modify health professions education and training to ensure providers understand and can offer culturally competent information and services.
- Provide graduate medical education funding for residencies or fellowships in the specialty of preventive medicine.