

LEADING HEALTH INDICATORS: Priorities for Action

The Leading Health Indicators are a set of 10 high-priority public health issues in the United States. The indicators are intended to help everyone understand more easily how healthy we are as a Nation and which are the most important changes we can make to improve our own health as well as the health of our families and communities. The Leading Health Indicators are:

- Physical Activity
- Overweight and Obesity
- Tobacco Use
- Substance Abuse
- Responsible Sexual Behavior
- Mental Health
- Injury and Violence
- Environmental Quality
- Immunization
- Access to Health Care

Each indicator will be tracked, measured and reported on regularly throughout the decade.

LEADING HEALTH INDICATORS: A CRITICAL LINK TO HEALTHY PEOPLE 2010

Healthy People 2010, a broad-based collaborative effort among Federal, State, and territorial governments, as well as hundreds of private, public, and nonprofit organizations, has set national disease prevention and health promotion objectives to be achieved by the end of this decade (www.healthypeople.gov). The effort has two overarching goals: to increase the quality and years of healthy life and to eliminate health disparities. *Healthy People 2010* features 467 science-based objectives and 10 Leading

Health Indicators, which use a smaller set of objectives to track progress toward meeting *Healthy People 2010* goals.

SEEING THE WHOLE PICTURE

Each Leading Health Indicator is an important health issue by itself. Together, the set of indicators helps us understand that there are many factors that matter to the health of individuals, communities and the Nation. Each of the indicators depends to some extent on:

- The information people have about their health and how to make improvements
- Choices people make (behavioral factors)
- Where and how people live (environmental, economic and social conditions)
- The type, amount and quality of health care people receive (access to health care and characteristics of the healthcare system)

Realizing improvements for the set of indicators will require effective public- and private-sector programs that address multiple factors.

MAKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS INDICATORS

Identifying changes to improve any one of the Leading Health Indicators is good; identifying changes that will cut across and improve several indicators simultaneously is also important. Thinking "outside the indicator" means that we can look at how one contributing factor or one important change may affect several indicators. The indicators can also provide the foundation for new partnerships across health issues and new thinking about how to address the many health concerns we face.



An example of this type of innovative thinking is collaboration among those who want to increase the amount of physical activity individuals do and promote weight loss to reach a healthy weight. Other cross-cutting action ideas are:

- Combining education for parents into a “healthy home” program that addresses injury prevention, nutrition, and the impact of environmental tobacco smoke on children and other family members.
- Designing worksite wellness programs to address several indicators simultaneously, such as physical activity, overweight and obesity, and tobacco use.
- Using existing communications and outreach efforts for immunization to promote enrollment of children in health insurance programs.

In short, the Leading Health Indicators can be a tool to develop comprehensive health activities that work simultaneously to improve many aspects of health.

FEDERAL RESOURCES

More information on the Leading Health Indicators, including links to Federal Web sites with data, planning tools, scientific information, and details about various programs are available at www.healthypeople.gov/lhi.

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE EVERYONE'S HEALTH

The Leading Health Indicators are intended to motivate citizens and communities to take actions to improve the health of individuals, families, communities and the Nation. The indicators can help us determine *what each one of us can do* and *where we can best focus our energies*—at home, and in our communities, worksites, businesses, or States—to live better and longer.

Some possible actions are:

- *Adopt the 10 Leading Health Indicators as personal and professional guides for choices about how to make health improvements.*
- *Encourage public health professionals and public officials to adopt the Leading Health Indicators as the basis for public health priority-setting and decision-making.*
- *Urge our public and community health systems and our community leadership to use the Leading Health Indicators as measures of local success for investments in health improvements.*

For more information about the *Healthy People 2010* Leading Health Indicators
www.healthypeople.gov/lhi

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