

# **THE HEALTHY LIFESTYLES AND PREVENTION (HeLP) AMERICA ACT OF 2004**

Promoting healthy behaviors such as eating nutritious foods, being physically active, avoiding tobacco use, and ensuring access to mental health services can prevent or control the devastating effects of many chronic diseases. The Healthy Lifestyles and Prevention (HeLP) America Act of 2004 recognizes the challenges posed by chronic disease and also looks to harness the power of prevention. It seeks to reorient our health care system away from one focused on disease treatment and management to one that is based upon the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the prevention of chronic disease.

## **CHRONIC DISEASE AND HEALTH CARE COSTS**

Health care costs in the United States continue to spiral out of control. On a per capita basis, the United States spends 40 percent more than any other country on health care as a proportion of our gross domestic product. The high costs of chronic disease management and treatment are a major contributing factor to these exploding health care costs. With the percentage of Americans over the age of 65 expected to double over the next 30 years, these costs are expected to continue to rise. One obvious way to reduce health care costs in the United States, especially the costs associated with the management and treatment of chronic diseases, is to reduce and prevent the incidence of chronic disease in the first place.

## **ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CHRONIC DISEASE**

The economic impact of chronic disease in the United States is staggering. The United States spends over \$1.8 trillion annually on health care. Fully 75 percent of this amount is spent on the treatment of chronic disease. The economic impact of chronic diseases can be seen in the huge annual costs associated with cardiovascular disease (\$352 billion), obesity (\$117 billion), tobacco use (\$75 billion), and mental illness (\$150 billion). Chronic diseases also incur major costs on individuals. Obese individuals expend personal income on health care costs at a rate significantly higher than other Americans, even higher than smokers and heavy drinkers.

## **MEDICAL IMPACT OF CHRONIC DISEASE**

In addition to economic costs, largely preventable chronic diseases also have major medical impacts. Chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are the leading causes of death and disability in the United States. These diseases are responsible for 7 of every 10 deaths and affect the quality of life of 90 million Americans. In fact, 38.2% of all deaths in 2000 were due to just a few avoidable factors - tobacco use, poor nutrition and physical inactivity, and alcohol consumption. Chronic disease does not affect just older Americans. One-third of the years of potential life lost before age 65 are due to chronic disease. The generation attending school now will most likely live a shorter life span than their parents, the first time in the nation's history to do so.

## **THE HeLP AMERICA ACT OF 2004**

Even though chronic diseases are among the most common and costly health problems, they are also among the most preventable. Yet only 2 percent of annual health care spending in the United States goes toward the prevention of chronic diseases.

Promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing chronic disease will not be accomplished quickly or simply. Achieving these goals will require a comprehensive approach that, rather than focusing on sickness, encourages healthy lifestyles and integrates healthy choices into individual's daily lives. The HeLP America Act of 2004 recognizes the challenges of chronic disease and health promotion and provides all sectors - child care centers, schools, workplaces, and communities -with the tools that they need to reach the goal of making America a healthier place.