

## **Cost-Effective Strategies in Public Health: The “Winnable Battles” Initiative**

The “Winnable Battles” initiative targets some of the nation’s major health challenges by using programs that have demonstrated significant progress in preventing the leading causes of illness, injury, death and disability in the United States. The Winnable Battles focus is on containing costs and achieving quick and measurable results in specific areas: food safety; health care-associated infections; HIV; motor vehicle injuries; nutrition, physical activity and obesity; teen pregnancy; tobacco and ADHD. The initiative was initiated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and in support of the Department of Health and Human Services and other priorities.

### ***Food Safety***

Food borne diseases affect millions of people and cause thousands of deaths in the United States each year. According to the CDC, about one in six Americans get sick, nearly 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die of food borne disease each year. They also account for billions of dollars in health care-related and industry-related costs. Reducing food borne illnesses by 10 percent would keep 5 million people from getting sick each year. The new Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), effective in 2010, is the first major change to U.S. food safety laws since 1938. The act was updated to include prevention-based inspection and compliance controls as a way to reduce the health and economic effects of food borne illnesses. The act allows the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to respond to food safety problems as they arise and holds imported and domestically produced foods to the same standard.

### **State Role**

Public health surveillance systems track many of these food borne pathogens. States maintain primary responsibility for inspecting food facilities and reporting food borne outbreaks. The lack of a unified strategy has impaired the government’s ability to reduce food related illnesses like *Salmonella*, the leading food-borne pathogen in the U.S. State and local efforts are critical to strengthening the national food safety system, according to the CDC.

### ***Healthcare-Associated Infections***

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) sicken one of every 20 hospitalized patients and are caused by a wide variety of bacteria, fungi and viruses. According to the CDC, HAIs account for nearly 1.7 million infections and 99,000 associated deaths each year. Treating the two most common HAIs, sepsis and pneumonia, costs an estimated \$8.1 billion annually. The financial burden of these infections is great, especially for state Medicaid programs. CDC advises that adherence to infection prevention guidelines is necessary to ensure safe care is provided in hospital setting, outpatient surgery centers, long-term care facilities, rehabilitation centers and community clinics.

### **State Role**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided states with \$50 million for HAI planning and public reporting. As of mid-2011, at least 27 states required health care facilities to publicly report infections in an effort to improve patient care, increase transparency and reduce costs related to healthcare-associated infections.

### ***HIV***

More than 1 million people in the United States are infected with HIV, and more than 50,000 become newly infected each year. As many as 20 percent of those affected are unaware of their

infection. HIV testing is essential to prevention. CDC's comprehensive HIV surveillance systems not only monitor changes in HIV incidence, prevalence and mortality, but also provide insight into risk factors for HIV infection. The CDC promotes routine testing as a key prevention tool for all adults and adolescents. It recommends annual testing for people who are at increased risk and with each pregnancy for women.

**State Role:**

To encourage HIV testing, most states have confidentiality standards, and laws in 19 states have been changed to make HIV testing more accessible. The CDC recommends informed written consent be incorporated into the general consent to medical care with an option to not undergo HIV testing. Through prevention programs, research and evaluation, surveillance, and policy development, the CDC provides funding to states and territories.

***Motor Vehicle Injuries***

Motor vehicle-related injuries are the leading cause of death for people ages 5 to 34 in the United States, resulting in \$41 billion in medical and work-loss costs each year. CDC promotes policies and programs to reduce accidents and improve the safety of drivers, passengers, bicyclists and pedestrians. CDC focuses on increasing seat belt use, promoting teen driving safety and reducing alcohol-impaired driving.

**State Role:**

In all states and the District of Columbia state health department programs collect data on rates of unintentional and violence-related injuries—including motor vehicle safety—to help establish outreach services to specific groups in need. Most states also have injury and violence units that coordinate and lead state prevention initiatives. Money for state programs is provided by state general fund appropriations, federal grants and other sources.

***Nutrition, Physical Activity & Obesity***

Excess weight contributes to many leading causes of death, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers. In 2010, 12 states had obesity rates of 30 percent or more compared with no states in 2000. CDC supports several approaches to fight obesity, including improving the food environment in child care settings, schools, hospitals and workplaces; eliminating artificial trans fat in the food supply; reducing sodium levels in processed and restaurant foods; and increasing the number of people who meet recommended physical activity guidelines.

**State Role:**

States have adopted numerous policies to reduce obesity rates, such as requiring physical education or recess in schools; nutrition education and/or nutrition standards in schools; school wellness policies; body mass index testing; joint-use agreements to increase community access to indoor and outdoor school recreation facilities, when not in use by students; insurance coverage for obesity prevention and treatment; and diabetes screening and management. Some states provide financial incentives for people who participate in wellness programs.

Currently 25 states have funding through CDC's Nutritional Physical Activity and Obesity cooperative agreement program, which addresses obesity by coordinating statewide efforts with multiple public-private partners.

## ***Teen Pregnancy***

In 2010, 34.3 in 1,000 teenagers ages 15 to 19 became mothers. Teen pregnancies can have immediate and long-term negative effects for teen parents and their children. Pregnancy and birth are significant contributors to high school dropout rates among girls, and their children also are more likely to do poorly in school and drop out of high school. Teen pregnancies also perpetuate an existing cycle of social, economic and educational disadvantage in communities, especially for U.S. racial and ethnic groups.

### **State Role:**

States have adopted numerous policies to help reduce teen pregnancy, including those that support school-based sexual health education programs that address abstinence and contraception; support community-based programs for at-risk teens; require sexual health education curricula to be science-based; and expand Medicaid family planning services.

As part of the President's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, CDC is supporting nine state and community-based organizations to reduce the rate of teen pregnancies and births by increasing education and access to teen pregnancy prevention and community-based services.

## ***Tobacco***

Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the United States. An estimated 46.6 million people —about one in five U.S. adults—currently smoke. Each year, an estimated 443,000 people die prematurely from diseases caused by smoking or second-hand smoke exposure. Tobacco use also causes a significant economic burden; it is responsible for about \$100 billion per year in medical expenditures and another \$100 billion per year in lost productivity.

### **State Role:**

States have adopted numerous policies to reduce tobacco use, such as enacting smoking restrictions, placing tobacco products behind store counters, providing Medicaid coverage for tobacco cessation, offering state employee programs that provide cessation support and benefits, and requiring smoke-free workplaces.

CDC supports state policies that protect nonsmokers from second-hand smoke, use of media to graphically show how smoking affects the body, well-funded tobacco control programs, and implementation of other evidence-based policies to decrease the number of smokers and save lives.