

Healthy Communities Washington

Healthy people in healthy places

Preventing chronic disease where we live, learn, work, and play

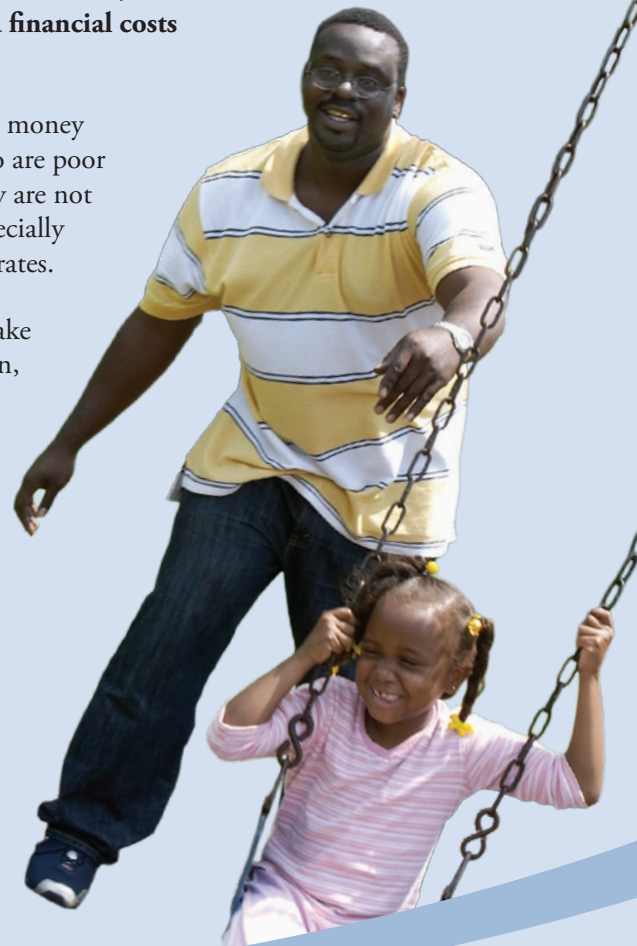
We are witnessing a tragedy here in Washington. Preventable diseases, like diabetes, cancer and heart disease, have tragic personal and financial costs for all of us.

Medical costs in Washington are off the charts. Businesses lose money because our workforce is unhealthy. We know that people who are poor are more likely to have one or more of these diseases. And they are not getting the care that they need. Too many people of color, especially American Indians and African Americans, are dying at higher rates.

We can do something about it. If we work together, we can make sure that healthy choices are easier to make where we live, learn, work, and play. We can make changes to help people avoid these diseases, and to help people who have them to be healthier. These changes can only happen if we work together: government, businesses, unions, schools, and health care.

I hope that you will join me in creating healthier places for us all: **Healthy Communities Washington.**

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Washington State Health Officer



Healthy Communities Washington is an initiative
of the Washington State Department of Health

What are Chronic Diseases?

Chronic diseases are ongoing illnesses or conditions that are generally not curable. Cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and asthma are all chronic diseases. These diseases can often be prevented. Many can be managed through early detection and treatment, and with better nutrition, physical activity, and quitting smoking.

Unhealthy Truths about Chronic Diseases

- Chronic diseases are the leading cause of death and disability in Washington and in the United States.
- Chronic diseases account for **75%** of health-related spending in the nation.
- **Two-thirds** of the increase in health care spending is due to the rise in treated chronic disease.
- Obesity cases **doubled** between 1987 and 2009 in Washington and the nation. This accounts for 20–30 percent of the rise in health care spending during the same time period.
- Many cases of chronic disease could be prevented or better managed. Many Americans are not aware of this.

Chronic Disease in Washington

Chronic diseases – cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and asthma – are the leading causes of disability and death in Washington. Chronic diseases shorten lives, reduce quality of life, and create a substantial burden for caregivers. While the human cost is enormous, the economic cost is also significant.

Treating illness is essential, but it is a “downstream” approach. Investing in prevention to reduce or reverse chronic disease is a way to work “upstream.” Research shows that most factors that influence health are found in the environments where we live, learn, work, and play. These factors shape behavior and safety. However, only five cents of every dollar spent on health care is spent on changing the underlying conditions that determine health in the first place.

The Washington State Department of Health’s vision focuses on population-based strategies to prevent chronic diseases. Healthier environments and policies promote and enable health for all by making the healthy choice the easy choice.



Chronic Disease by the Numbers

In Washington: We are all affected by the cost.

- \$5 billion annually for medical treatment
- Over \$18 billion in lost productivity

People with low income and low education have higher risk of disease.

The less advantaged a person, the more likely they are to live in a neighborhood where conditions make it hard to practice healthy behaviors. For this reason, Washington adults at the lowest levels of income and education are 2–3 times more likely to develop a chronic disease.



Nearly
60%

of deaths in 2007 were caused by cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, or asthma.

Almost
84%

of Washington adults engaged in behaviors that put them at risk for these diseases.

- 1.9 million are physically inactive
- 3.6 million have poor nutrition
- 814,000 use tobacco products

50%

of Washington adults are at a high risk of developing these diseases because of other conditions.

- 1.3 million people are obese
- 1.2 million people have high blood pressure
- 1.8 million people diagnosed with high cholesterol

Nearly
1 million

Washington adults live with these diseases.

- 454,000 are living with asthma
- 343,000 are living with diabetes
- 248,000 are living with heart disease
- 107,000 have had a stroke
- 34,000 have been diagnosed with cancer



Fighting Chronic Disease

- **Place matters.** Where people live, learn, work, and play affect their health.
- **People are healthier** when they have easy access to parks, nutritious food, and live in communities with safe and affordable housing.
- **Prevention can reduce or modify risk factors** such as exposure to tobacco, poor diet, and lack of physical activity.
- Since many chronic diseases have common risk factors, it makes sense to **reduce those risks** in a comprehensive way.
- **Improving the health of the general population** can have an enormous impact on chronic diseases and health care costs by preventing or delaying disease.
- **Funding prevention** is a valuable investment with long term dividends. An investment of \$10 per person per year in programs that boost physical activity, improve nutrition, and prevent tobacco use will show a return on investment in just two years.
- **Investments in communities** with higher risk factors will result in even greater savings and will improve health equity.



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