

Economic Benefits of Preventing Disease

Prevention can reduce the significant economic burden of disease in addition to improving the length and quality of people's lives. Treatment, lost productivity, and health care costs are significant burdens to the economy, families, and businesses. Prevention policies and programs often are cost-effective, reduce health care costs, and improve productivity. The following examples show why prevention is the best buy in health.

Prevention lowers health care costs

- For every HIV infection prevented, an estimated \$355,000 is saved in the cost of providing lifetime HIV treatment.³¹⁹
- A proven program that prevents diabetes may save costs within three years.³²⁰ One of every five U.S. health care dollars is spent on caring for people with diagnosed diabetes.³²¹ People who increased physical activity (2½ hours a week) and had 5 to 7 percent weight loss reduced their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 58 percent regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender.³²²
- A 5 percent reduction in the prevalence of hypertension would save \$25 billion in 5 years.³²³
- Annual health care costs are \$2,000 higher for smokers, \$1,400 higher for people who are obese, and \$6,600 higher for those who have diabetes than for nonsmokers, people who are not obese, or people do not have diabetes.³²⁴
- A 1 percent reduction in weight, blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol risk factors would save \$83 to \$103 annually in medical costs per person.³²⁵
- Increasing use of preventive services, including tobacco cessation screening, alcohol abuse screening and aspirin use, to 90 percent of the recommended levels could save \$3.7 billion annually in medical costs.³²⁶
- Medical costs are reduced by approximately \$3.27 for every dollar spent on workplace wellness programs, according to a recent study.³²⁷
- Dietary sodium is linked to increased prevalence of hypertension, a primary risk factor for cardiovascular and renal diseases. Cardiovascular disease alone accounts for nearly 20 percent of medical expenditures and 30 percent of Medicare expenditures.³²⁸
- Reducing average population sodium intake to 2,300 milligrams per day could save \$18 billion in health care costs annually.³²⁹
- Tobacco use accounts for 11 percent of Medicaid costs and nearly 10 percent of Medicare costs.³³⁰
- Tobacco screening is estimated to result in lifetime savings of \$9,800 per person.³³¹

Prevention increases productivity

- Indirect costs to employers of employee poor health—lower productivity, higher rates of disability, higher rates of injury, and more workers' compensation claims—can be two to three times the costs of direct medical expenses.³³²
- Asthma, high blood pressure, smoking, and obesity each reduce annual productivity by between \$200 and \$440 per person.³³³
- Workers with diabetes average two more work days absent per year than workers without diabetes.³³⁴
- Absenteeism costs are reduced by approximately \$2.73 for every dollar spent on workplace wellness programs, according to a recent study.³²⁷
- Research from the Milken Institute suggests that a modest reduction in avoidable risk factors could lead to a gain of more than \$1 trillion annually in labor supply and efficiency by 2023.³³⁵