Empowered People

Although policies and programs can make healthy options available, people still have the responsibility to make healthy choices. People are empowered when they have the knowledge, ability, resources, and motivation to identify and make healthy choices.[75] When people are empowered, they are able to take an active role in improving their health, support their families and friends in making healthy choices, and lead community change.[76]

KEY FACTS

- Health information is often presented in a way that many Americans find difficult to understand and put into action.[77] Nearly 9 in 10 adults have problems using the health information available to them in health care facilities, retail outlets, media, and communities.[78]

- A person's decisions are influenced by how choices are presented (i.e., choice architecture).[79] For example, presenting fruit in a more attractive way to school children can more than double the amount of fruit they purchase.[80]

- Discrimination, stigma, or unfair treatment in the workplace can have a profound impact on health.[81] For example, discrimination can increase blood pressure, heart rate, and stress, as well as undermine self-esteem and self-efficacy.[82]

- Education, employment, and health are linked. Without a good education, prospects for a stable and rewarding job with good earnings decrease.[83] Education is associated with living longer, experiencing better health, and practicing health-promoting behaviors such as exercising regularly, refraining from smoking, and obtaining timely health checkups and screenings.[84]

Recommendations: What Can Be Done?

Decision making is a complex process, influenced by personal, cultural, social, economic, and environmental factors, including individuals' ability to meet their daily needs, the opinions and behaviors of their peers, and their own knowledge and motivation.[85] Information alone is often not enough to change behavior—communities, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods can support people in making and sustaining healthy choices.[86] Providing tools and information, making healthy choices easy and affordable, and improving the social environment and context in which decisions are made all support people in making healthy choices.[87]

1 Provide people with tools and information to make healthy choices.
Information needs to be available to people in ways that make it easy for them to make informed decisions about their health.[88] Providing people with accurate information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate and matches their health literacy skills helps them search for and use health information and adopt healthy behaviors.[89] For example, providing people with information about the risks and benefits of preventive health services can motivate them to seek preventive care.[90] Providing people with information (e.g., nutrition information on menus and food product labels) can help increase demand for healthy options and may influence supply, because companies are more likely to provide healthy options when they perceive consumer demand for such products.[91]

### 2 Promote positive social interactions and support healthy decision making.
Interactions with family members, friends, and coworkers, involvement in community life, and cultural attitudes, norms, and expectations, have a profound effect on the choices people make and on their overall health.[92] Enhanced social networks and social connectedness (e.g., through volunteer opportunities, transportation services, or workplace safety and health initiatives) can help encourage people to be physically active, reduce stress, eat healthier, and live independently.[93] Mass media and social media can be used to help promote health and well-being.[94] Individuals' decisions are influenced by how environments are designed and how choices are presented.[95] Small changes to the environment in which people make decisions can support an individual's ability to make healthy choices.[96] For example, making stairwells more attractive and safe increases their use and placing healthy options near cash registers can increase their likelihood of purchase. [97]

3 Engage and empower people and communities to plan and implement prevention policies and programs.
Providing people with tools and skills needed to plan and implement prevention policies and programs can help create and sustain community change.[98] Effective public participation can help ensure that health equity and sustainability are considered in decision making

(e.g., community planning, zoning, and land use decisions).[99] Community coalitions can be effective in raising awareness and attention to a broad range of issues (e.g., alcohol and other substance abuse, teen pregnancy, cancer prevention and control) and implementing effective policies and programs.[100]

4 Improve education and employment opportunities.

Without employment and education, people are often ill-equipped to make healthy choices.[101] Education can lead to improved health by increasing health knowledge, enabling people to adopt healthier behaviors and make better-informed choices for themselves and their families.[102] Employment that provides sufficient income allows people to obtain health coverage, medical care, healthy and safe neighborhoods and housing, healthy food, and other basic goods.[103] Employment can also influence a range of social and psychological factors, including sense of control, social standing, and social support.[104] Programs and policies to reduce high school dropout rates make advanced education more affordable, and promote job growth and quality can have a large impact on people's ability to make healthy choices.[105]

Smoking Rates are Associated with Education
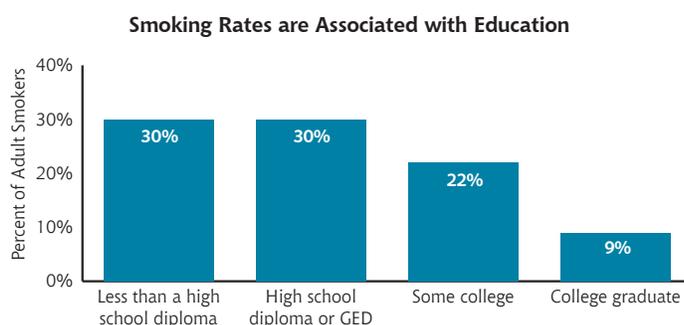
Source: National Health Interview Survey, CDC, 2009

Actions
The Federal Government will
- Identify and address barriers to the dissemination and use of reliable health information.
- Use plain language in health information for the public in alignment with the Plain Writing Act.
- Support research and evaluation studies that examine health literacy factors in the study of other issues (e.g., patient safety, emergency preparedness, health care costs).
- Work to reduce false or misleading claims about the health

benefits of products and services.
- Support research and programs that help people make healthy choices (e.g., understand how choices should be presented).

Partners Can
State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Governments can
- Create healthy environments that support people's ability to make healthy choices (e.g., smoke-free buildings, attractive stairwells, cafeterias with healthy options).
- Offer accurate, accessible, and actionable health information in diverse settings and programs.

Businesses and Employers can
- Implement work-site health initiatives in combination with illness and injury prevention policies and programs that empower employees to act on health and safety concerns.
- Use media (e.g., television, Internet, social networking) to promote health.

Health Care Systems, Insurers, and Clinicians can
- Use proven methods of checking and confirming patient understanding of health promotion and disease prevention (e.g., teach-back method).
- Involve consumers in planning, developing, implementing, disseminating, and evaluating health and safety information.
- Use alternative communication methods and tools (e.g., mobile phone applications, personal health records, credible health websites) to support more traditional written and oral communication.
- Refer patients to adult education and English-language instruction programs to help enhance understanding of health promotion and disease prevention messages.

Early Learning Centers, Schools, Colleges, and Universities can
- Provide input, guidance, and technical assistance to state, tribal, local, and territorial health departments in assessing health impacts and conducting comprehensive health improvement planning.
- Incorporate health education into coursework (e.g., by embedding health-related tasks, skills, and examples into lesson plans).

Key Indicators	Current	10-Year Target
Proportion of persons who report their health care provider always explained things so they could understand them	60.0%	66.0%
Proportion of adults reporting that they receive the social and emotional support they need	80.0%	88.0%

Empowered People

Community, Non-Profit, and Faith-Based Organizations can

- Empower individuals and their families to develop and participate in health protection and health promotion programs through neighborhood associations, labor unions, volunteer/service projects, or community coalitions.
- Identify and help connect people to key resources (e.g., for health care, education, and safe playgrounds).
- Support and expand continuing and adult education programs (e.g., English language instruction, computer skills, health literacy training).

Individuals and Families can

- Actively participate in personal as well as community prevention efforts.
- Participate in developing health information and provide feedback regarding the types of health information that are most useful and effective.
- Provide clinicians with relevant information (e.g., health history, symptoms, medications, allergies), ask questions and take notes during appointments, learn more about their diagnosis or condition, and follow up with recommended appointments.

KEY DOCUMENTS
- National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy
- Questions are the Answer
- Health Literacy Online
- Healthfinder.gov (http://www.healthfinder.gov)

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Active Living by Design: Albuquerque, New Mexico
Working to create community-led change, Active Living By Design helps support individual's choices to eat healthier and increase physical activity. Albuquerque's Healthy Eating School-Based Partnership includes school districts, individual schools, and local farmers working to increase student, parent, and teacher consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by expanding access to locally grown produce.