

# POLICY STATEMENT



National Forum for Heart Disease & Stroke Prevention

[www.hearthealthystrokefree.org](http://www.hearthealthystrokefree.org)

**OCTOBER 2008**

## **Prevention of Heart Disease and Stroke Should be an Essential Element of Health Care Reform Efforts**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

One of the essential elements of the mission of the National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention is to reduce the burden, both in dollars and in human suffering, of heart disease and stroke on our society. Real progress in this area cannot be achieved unless the vast majority of Americans have access to high quality, affordable health care with a strong emphasis on prevention. Policymakers should include a strong and vigorous focus on prevention as a starting point for comprehensive health reform if we hope to improve the health status, longevity and quality of life for all Americans.

### **PREVENTION AND HEALTH CARE REFORM**

Heart disease and stroke are the first and third leading causes of death in the United States, respectively. For 2008, the cost of these diseases is estimated to be \$448.5 billion.<sup>i</sup> The prevalence and cost of both heart disease and stroke is expected to increase significantly over the next two decades as the "baby boomer" generation ages. Currently, an estimated 80,700,000 American adults (1 in 3) have

one or more types of cardiovascular disease (CVD). Of these 38,200,000 are estimated to be 60 or older.<sup>ii</sup> In 2004, final mortality data show CVD as the underlying cause of 36.3 percent of all deaths in the United States.<sup>iii</sup> In every year since 1900, except 1918, CVD accounted for more than any other single cause or group of causes of death in the United States.<sup>iv</sup>

At present, almost one-fifth of Americans do not have some type of public or private health insurance, greatly limiting their access to health care services, especially preventive services.

More importantly, for the National Forum's work, the 2004-2006 National Health Interview Survey<sup>v</sup> (National Center for Health Statistics) indicated that 13.5 percent of adults age 18-64 who have cardiovascular disease are uninsured. These individuals are far less likely than their insured counterparts to receive appropriate and timely medical care, and suffer worse medical outcomes. Uninsured stroke patients have a 56 percent higher mortality rate from acute ischemic stroke.

This "crisis" in our health care system has accelerated calls for some type of health care reform. Polls indicate that health

care ranks as one of the top domestic policy concerns among Americans. Consequently, all presidential candidates, and many senior members of the legislative branch, have proposed reforms to the health care system that:

- Address increases in costs;
- Ensure access to some type of affordable health insurance for the majority of Americans; and
- Eliminate disparities in health status among different ethnic groups.

Clearly, there are differences in each approach to health care reform, but it is imperative that each plan contain a common component—a strong and vigorous focus on prevention, specifically cardiovascular disease and stroke prevention. Policymakers must address the prevention of chronic disease, including heart disease and stroke, as a starting point for comprehensive health reform if we hope to improve the health status, longevity and quality of life for all Americans.

The data support this. A recent study by the Trust for America's Health<sup>vi</sup> found that \$10 spent per person per year on prevention strategies, including those outlined in *A Public Health Action Plan to Prevent Heart Disease and Stroke* and the Healthy People 2010 goals, would save \$16 billion annually after five years, and a

Milken Institute report<sup>vii</sup> found that we can avoid losing \$1.1 trillion in lost productivity and health care costs in the year 2023 by investing in prevention of chronic disease. Unfortunately, at present, we spend only pennies of our health care dollar on prevention.

Undertaking efforts to make major changes to our health care system is a daunting task, but one that has become necessary. If our system is to be sustainable, provide high quality care and improve the quality of life and health for the greatest number of Americans, substantial investment should be made in proven prevention strategies to reduce the cost and burden of heart disease and stroke.

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL FORUM

The National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention (National Forum) is made up of more than 80 organizations committed to building a heart-healthy and stroke-free society. The National Forum provides leadership in implementing the recommendations contained in *A Public Health Action Plan to Prevent Heart Disease and Stroke*.

---

<sup>i</sup> American Heart Association, *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2008 Update*, 37

<sup>ii</sup> *2008 Update*, 6

<sup>iii</sup> *2008 Update*, 7

<sup>iv</sup> NCHS; [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/docs/shs\\_db.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/docs/shs_db.pdf).

<sup>v</sup> Cohen R A, Makuc D M. State, regional, and national estimates of health insurance coverage for people under 65 years of age: National Health Interview Survey, 2004-2006. National health statistics reports; no1. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2008.

<sup>vi</sup> Trust for America's Health: <http://www.healthyamericans.org/reports/prevention08/Prevention08>.

<sup>vii</sup> Ross DeVol and Armen Bedroussian, with Anita Charuworn, Anusuya Chatterjee, In Kyu Kim, Soojung Kim and Kevin Klowden, *An Unhealthy America: The Economic Burden of Chronic Disease -- Charting a New Course to Save Lives and Increase Productivity and Economic Growth*, October 2007.