



The Power of Prevention: Pillars of our Health System

Prevention: Creating conditions where all patients and populations can keep and promote optimal health through intervention, policy, and systems-change to prevent illness and promote well-being.

Despite spending more on health care than other high-income countries¹, the United States ranks last overall in health care outcomes of those nations.² The U.S. is plagued by high infant mortality, instances of comorbid chronic conditions that are double the rates of comparable countries, and decreasing life expectancy.³ While much of the political debate around health care in the United States has focused primarily on insurance coverage and access, it has lacked discussion around a true transformation of the health system. The American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM) believes that to truly improve outcomes, health, longevity, and quality of life, we must create a health system that is based on prevention.

To achieve this ideal state of health in the U.S., there are four distinct pillars that must be prioritized in transforming our health system.

1. A comprehensive and inclusive definition of health and the health system.
2. Prevention is a priority.
3. Empowered patients, populations, and providers.
4. A well-resourced workforce and healthcare infrastructure.

A Comprehensive and Inclusive Definition of Health and Health System

The definition of health must include all facets of health, including physical, mental, and emotional health. This necessitates widening the definition of the health system as well. The health system is more than simply a combination of patients, physicians, insurers, and hospitals. To swim upstream, there must be a strong focus on the social determinants of health, and the intersection of health with other policy areas.

Policy Recommendations:

- “Health in all Policies” approach becomes the norm for federal, state, and local policymaking.
- Social determinants of health interventions are prioritized legislatively, including funding and technical assistance for housing, food security, transportation, and workforce development programs.
 - Example legislation: H.R. 4004 - The Social Determinants Accelerator Act of 2019.
- Any health reform legislation must include coverage for mental health.

1. S. H. Woolf and L. Aron (eds.), U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health (National Academies Press, 2013).
2. https://interactives.commonwealthfund.org/2017/july/mirror-mirror/assets/Schneider_mirror_mirror_2017_Appendices.pdf
3. <https://interactives.commonwealthfund.org/2017/july/mirror-mirror/>

Prevention is a Priority

To shift from a sick-care system to a system that promotes health and well-being, prevention must be viewed as a national priority. Upstream interventions must be given prominence, and resources, including funding, and must be aligned to promote prevention in the long-term. This change will necessitate payment measures that prioritize prevention, including through coding, reimbursement, and scoring.

Policy Recommendations:

- The Congressional Budget Office scoring time frame must expand beyond ten years to truly estimate the full economic value of preventive healthcare spending.
- The shift to value-based care should be embraced and fulfilled.
- The Federal Anti-Kickback Statute and Physician Self-Referral (Stark) law must be reformed.

Empowered Patients, Populations, and Providers

To truly have an integrated health system that benefits all, we must empower patients, populations, and providers. Universal access to health care and health-promoting activities are a bedrock for this pillar. More than just insurance coverage, this means patient education and access to medical information and true partnerships between patients and providers. At a population level, communities need multi-sector coalitions to ensure programs and infrastructure are in place to move the needle on increasing the health and well-being of their populations.

Policy Recommendations:

- Universal insurance coverage and care access must be implemented.
- Policies that increase information for patients, such as menu and nutrition labeling, must be embraced.

A Well-Resourced Workforce and Healthcare Infrastructure

Without the workforce and infrastructure to put these programs in place, the ideal of a healthy nation will be out of reach. We must ensure that we have the funding to eliminate shortages in our trained public health, primary care, and specialty care medical workforce. These professionals must receive training not only to ensure prevention is a key component of any health services, but to understand the meaning of an integrated system that operates on a continuum of care within the larger definition of “health system.” The U.S. must ensure that individual and population based care is prioritized, including the ability to identify and rapidly address emerging public health issues. It will be essential to support this workforce with a modernized infrastructure, including data and technology-driven treatment and care.

Policy Recommendations:

- Physician training must be modernized to include advancements in lifestyle medicine, prevention, population health, and technology-driven care.
- Investments must be made to ensure data-sharing between government departments.
- Innovative and long-term funding of preventive medicine residency programs must be prioritized.