

Health Trends in Indiana

Chronic diseases—such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes—are the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the United States, and are among the most prevalent, costly, and preventable of all health problems. Chronic diseases are not prevented by vaccines. However, their incidence is greatly affected by actions taken by individuals in their daily lives including the avoidance of tobacco and alcohol use, participation in regular physical activity, and proper nutrition.

Data on health risk behaviors for chronic diseases and use of preventative practices are essential for developing effective health education and intervention programs and policies to prevent morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases.

This report provides a snapshot of certain trends in health indicators among individuals in the State of Indiana, and Lake and Marion Counties. The findings indicate substantial variation in health risk behaviors and use of preventative services among adults at state and local levels, indicating a need for appropriate public health interventions and continued efforts to evaluate public health programs and policies and healthcare related efforts designed to reduce morbidity and mortality.

One major goal of public health is to prevent and reduce the prevalence of health risk behaviors and subsequent morbidity and mortality attributed to chronic diseases. In order to reduce the incidence of behavior risk factors and chronic diseases, strategies must be put in place which offer health screening and referral services—especially for at-risk populations, effective health promotion through worksites and health care settings, and must emphasize disease prevention.

The nation's current health care system emphasizes treatment of illness and specialist care rather than disease prevention and primary care. A focus on prevention can dramatically reduce the long-term cost burden and health care demands of chronic conditions. State and federal health policies should support and reward effective disease prevention strategies which must be fully funded in order to appreciably reduce the incidence rates of chronic diseases in Indiana. Policies must also address the increasing costs of health care coverage as well as the increasing number of individuals with inferior health care coverage or no health care coverage at all.

If the goal of public health is to prevent and reduce the prevalence of health risk behaviors and subsequent morbidity and mortality attributed to chronic diseases, federal and state governments must address the issues of continuing deterioration of affordability, coverage, and quality in health care, and acknowledge that a change in course is needed. The health care debate must first focus on defining the best role for local and national government in ensuring that *all* people receive the best health care value. It must also address funding for preventative measures which will ultimately save lives, lessen the burden of the nation's health care system, and reduce the amount of dollars—now in the billions—spent each year on costs associated with chronic disease management. Preventative measures should also include funding for health risk behavior and chronic disease research which is consistent, routine, comprehensive, and disaggregable to the local level so that appropriate and effective strategies can be put in place nationally and locally. ❖