



Health Care Spending in the U.S. Will Double in 10 Years

Diabetes will be a primary contributor to the amount of money people spend on health care in the United States, which is likely to double over the next 10 years - from \$2.1 trillion to \$4 trillion - according to a new report published in an online edition of Health Affairs.

Currently, approximately 16 cents of every dollar earned in the U.S. is spent on health care, according to 2006 estimates. The report anticipates that this will rise to 19.6 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2016. The growth is attributed to an aging population. Also, spending on prescription drugs is expected to grow by approximately 8.6 percent annually, to a level of \$500 billion in 2016. This is more than double the 2006 amount. U.S. citizens get the worst health care bargain in the world: They spend more on health care (or [sick care](#), actually) than any other nation, yet rates of chronic degenerative disease also remain higher in the U.S. than anywhere in the world. Clearly, the U.S. sick care system does not work.

The real reasons behind rising health care costs in the United States are the continued high prices of new drugs and the utter unwillingness of medical authorities to teach disease prevention to the population. Skyrocketing health care costs are bankrupting the U.S. economy and forcing businesses to shut down or move overseas. Half of all personal bankruptcies in the United States are due to medical bills. The sick care industry seems bent on leaving Americans bankrupt and living in a state of ongoing disease diagnosis and "management" rather than teaching people how to actually prevent disease. The cost of caring for aging Americans will add 25 percent to the nation's health care bill by 2030 unless people act now to stay healthy, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Thursday. Currently, 80 percent of Americans aged 65 and older have at least one chronic disease that could lead to premature death and disability, CDC researchers said.

The report, *The State of Aging and Health in America 2007*, projects that by 2030, 71 million Americans will be over 65, accounting for 20 percent of the U.S. population, up from 10 to 11 percent now. With the cost of caring for older Americans at three to five times greater than care for younger adults, CDC researchers believe policymakers and individuals should take steps to help aging adults forestall chronic disease.

"Given the demographics ... the economic impact on healthcare will be enormous," said Dr. Richard Murray, a vice president at Merck & Co. Inc., whose foundation funded the study. If people adopt healthier lifestyles, they will not develop the expensive, chronic diseases that raise health costs sharply, such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease.

"We are going to see an increase in health care costs, but the goal has to be to restrain the rate of increase. Prevention is the key to that," said Bill Benson, a health care benefits and policy analyst who advised the CDC on the report.

The report noted that three behaviors -- smoking, poor diet and physical inactivity -- caused almost 35 percent of U.S. deaths in 2000. Those three behaviors often lead to the development of the nation's leading chronic diseases: heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes, they said. "Having a chronic disease that's well managed doesn't necessarily put a person at risk for functional decline, but when someone starts developing problems, they are much more at risk," said Lynda Anderson, a chronic disease and aging expert at the CDC.

The report looks at how states are faring in terms of elderly health and providing preventive care such as immunizations and health screenings and taking steps to prevent falls, a major risk for the elderly.

"You have some regions that are doing extremely well in a lot of areas and others that are struggling to get these services to older adults," she said. Elderly people in Hawaii, for example, are likely to fare better in many key measures of health. The state ranked best in overall health, mental health, and disability and had the lowest percent of obese elderly. But Hawaii ranked last in terms of screening for colorectal cancer.

West Virginia ranked worst in terms of overall health, oral health and disability, while Kentucky had the highest level of elderly people reporting mental health problems. Louisiana reported the highest levels of obesity, with more than 25 percent of the elderly population considered obese.

She hopes the data will give state policymakers the right tools to start building prevention programs now, before chronic disease begins. *"We have the opportunity for prevention," Merck's Murray said. "We need to be serious about it." The report was authored by a team of economists, statisticians and actuaries from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.*

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