

Why Do We Need the Affordable Care Act?

This document is part of **Healthy Outlook**, which is designed to assist public health departments in adapting to the challenges and opportunities presented by health reform. All documents are available at www.apha.org.



There are numerous reasons health reform is critically needed in the United States, including:

Too many people lack health coverage.

- In July 2012, before the ACA took effect, the [Congressional Budget Office estimated](#) that 20% of the population under age 65 was uninsured. Although the ACA has decreased the uninsured rate, according to a recent [Gallup poll](#), more than 13% of people—nearly 1 in 8—still lack health insurance.
- The uninsured are less likely to receive preventive care and less likely to seek care as quickly when they are sick or injured. This results in higher costs when they do seek treatment. In addition, nearly 40% of the health care costs incurred by the uninsured are passed on to consumers who do have coverage, in the form of higher premiums. [According to Families USA](#), this costs each family with health coverage more than \$1,000 a year.

U.S. health care spending is unsustainable.

- Health care spending represented 17.9% of our gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010 and is [expected](#) to reach 20% by 2020. [Medicare](#) alone accounted for 15% of our federal budget in 2011, and, absent reform, this share is expected to grow as the baby boom generation continues to retire.
- Rising health care costs both contribute to our federal deficit and reduce our ability to spend in other important areas, including education, housing, and economic development. And the high costs of health care directly impact businesses and consumers: both family and employer shares of employer-based coverage [doubled](#) from 2001 to 2011.

Despite high spending, our health outcomes are poor.

- The U.S. spends far more on medical care than any other industrialized nation but [ranks 26th among 36 OECD countries](#) in terms of life expectancy. The Institute of Medicine [reported in 2012](#) that “the current generation of children and young adults in the United States could become the first generation to experience shorter life spans and fewer healthy years of life than those of their parents.”

Our system emphasizes treatment instead of prevention.

- Today, [7 in 10](#) deaths in the U.S. are related to preventable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and cancer, and [three quarters](#) of our health care dollars are spent treating such diseases. However, only [3 cents of each dollar spent on health care in the U.S.](#) (total public and private) go toward prevention.

Health disparities exist among numerous populations.

- Health inequities related to income and access to coverage exist across demographic lines, but population-based disparities are impossible to deny as well. For example, as reported by Families USA, African American women are more than [twice as likely to die during pregnancy](#) compared to non-Hispanic White women and Hispanics are [65% more likely to have diabetes](#).
- The Affordable Care Act won't solve all of these problems overnight, but it's an important step forward. By making health coverage more affordable and accessible and thus increasing the number of Americans with coverage, by funding community-based public health and prevention programs, and by supporting research and tracking on key health measures, the ACA will begin to reduce disparities, enhance access to preventive care, improve health outcomes, and lower the nation's health spending. Learn more [here](#).



The American Public Health Association champions the health of all people and all communities. We strengthen the profession of public health, promote best practices and share the latest public health research and information. We are the only organization that influences federal policy, has a 140-plus year perspective and brings together members from all fields of public health. Learn more at www.apha.org.