



public health



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We believe that every American should have the opportunity to be as healthy as he or she can be. Every community should be safe from health threats. And all Americans should have quality public health services that protect, promote and preserve their health, regardless of who they are or where they live.

We all have a stake in a strong public health system that ensures that our food is safe, prevents exposure to environmental toxins like secondhand smoke, assures access to flu shots, provides programs to prevent chronic diseases, and is prepared to act swiftly to protect the community in the event of a major health emergency. We are committed to building a public health system that will help us all live longer, healthier lives.

THE PROBLEM

Today, serious gaps exist in the nation's ability to safeguard health, putting our families, communities, states and nation at risk.

- Almost seven years after September 11, 2001, and almost three years after Hurricane Katrina, major problems remain in our readiness to respond to large-scale health emergencies. The country is still insufficiently prepared to protect people from disease outbreaks,

natural disasters, or acts of bioterrorism, leaving Americans unnecessarily vulnerable to these threats.

- Even though America spends more than \$2 trillion annually on health care—more than any other nation in the world, we do not have the healthiest people. Ninety-five percent of health spending goes toward medical care and biomedical research and only five percent to public health and disease prevention. Yet tens of millions of

Americans suffer every day from preventable illnesses and chronic diseases that rob them of health and quality of life. Public health epidemics such as obesity and tobacco use and exposure are putting millions of adults and children at risk for unprecedented levels of major diseases like cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

- Baby boomers may be the first generation to live less healthy lives than their parents. The major disease problems of our time will not be solved within our clinical care system through more expensive technology and more intensive treatment. What we need is less disease than we have now.
- Poor health is putting the nation's economic security in jeopardy. The skyrocketing costs of health care threaten to bankrupt American businesses, causing some companies to send jobs to other countries where costs are lower. Helping people to stay healthy and better manage illnesses are the best ways to drive down health care costs. Keeping the American workforce well helps American business remain competitive in the global economy.



A strong public health system focused on prevention of disease and injury are a critical part of the solution. We need to rethink how we spend our health dollars. Investing more in public health tops the list of ways we could start spending smarter.

OUR APPROACH
RWJF's Public Health team seeks to drive fundamental improvements in the public health system by 2015 by focusing on three integrated strategic areas: (1) improving the performance and impact of the public health system—which includes public health agencies, businesses, health and health care organizations, faith-based groups and community advocates; (2) building the evidence for what works to improve the quality and effectiveness of public health practice and policy and; (3) increasing the demand for and the use of public health policies and practices that improve health.

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RWJF is looking to make big changes in improving public health. This will require working with a wide range of partners, including researchers, public health practitioners, business leaders, policy-makers, advocates and citizens.

WHAT WE FUND

Improving Performance. For the public health system to fulfill its important role in ensuring the safety and health of the public, we must drive fundamental improvements in the quality, performance and impact of public health agencies. We are advancing efforts to help public health agencies improve the services they provide and increase accountability to the communities they serve. We support efforts to establish a national accreditation system for state and local public health agencies. Accreditation will establish agency standards and benchmarks that promote excellence, continuous quality improvement and accountability for the public's health.

Quality improvement efforts are not limited to public health agencies. We seek to improve the performance within and across the public health system. To that end, we foster collaboration among federal, state and local public health agencies and others integral to the public health system, such as businesses, health care providers, educational institutions, and faith- and community-based organizations. Recognizing the importance of strong leaders to strengthen the system, we are supporting a nationwide leadership program designed

to improve cooperation among federal, state and local leaders from the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors to work collaboratively to increase preparedness for the challenges of both manmade and natural disasters.

Building the Evidence. Our efforts to drive change in public health practice and policy include our investments in Public Health Systems and Services Research (PHSSR). PHSSR, a developing field of research that focuses on the organization, staffing, financing and management of public health systems, will help build the evidence for effective public health policies and practice. We (1) support research to evaluate the value and impact of accreditation and other quality improvement efforts; (2) seek to engage and expand the field of public health researchers and funding partners; (3) support integrated surveys on state, county and local public health activities; (4) expand the public repository of datasets and enhance their utility; and (5) assess how community policies can improve people's health. And our work to build the evidence extends beyond just understanding public health agencies, as the Public Health team is supporting research to understand the influence of

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various public health laws and policies on health outcomes.

Increasing the use of Public Health Policies that Improve Health.

Achieving our vision requires both strengthening of the practice of public health and the implementation of policies and laws that result in better health for all Americans. We are working with a broad range of public health, health care, business, and community groups to increase support among public policy-makers and other key influencers for improving the structure and funding of public health at the federal level. We support and work in partnership with health advocacy groups to produce research reports, policy briefs and state report cards on important public health issues, such as preparedness and tobacco use and exposure. These materials inform opinion leaders, policy-makers, the media and the public and enhance the understanding of priority public health needs, responsibilities and recommended actions.

At the state and community level, we support advocacy for proven tobacco control measures, such as smoke-free air laws, funding of prevention and cessation programs and increases in

tobacco taxes, with an emphasis on tax revenue dedicated to health and health care priorities. We will continue to use our experience in tobacco control to foster advocacy among public health agencies and health advocates in support of other public policies that improve people's health. The Public Health team is also working with local public health leaders and community advocates to advance knowledge of how tools such as health impact assessments, community health scorecards and public health laws might improve community health outcomes.

Communications. An integrated and comprehensive communications strategy, internally managed by the Foundation and implemented by various grantees and communications firms under contract, ensures quality, consistent, timely products and messages that help increase impact. A variety of strategies, tools and activities are deployed including media advocacy, public education advertising and direct mail, polling and message research, message development, news and information services, and communications and advocacy training.

WHAT WE DON'T FUND

The Public Health team does not accept unsolicited proposals. We expect to issue special solicitations for proposals and ideas periodically. If you are registered to receive notices through the Foundation's Web site, at www.rwjf.org, you will receive notices of funding opportunities through these alerts.

* Gostin et al. "The Future of the Public's Health: Vision, Values and Strategies." *Health Affairs*, July–August 2004.



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