

## The Cost of Chronic Disease: What West Virginia is Facing

### Chronic Disease is Killing and Costing West Virginia

The leading causes of death, illness and disability in West Virginia are chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis, cancer, and others.<sup>1</sup>

West Virginia, in fact, ranks among the highest in the nation in both the incidence of disease, especially diabetes, arthritis, and cardiovascular disease, and associated risk factors such as smoking and obesity.<sup>2</sup>

The needs of people with chronic diseases will be the primary driver of demand for health care and the resulting costs for the foreseeable future. With the aging population of West Virginia, the impact of chronic diseases will grow and, with it, the necessity to improve peoples' lives and contain costs.

Nationally, care for people with chronic diseases currently accounts for:

- 83% of healthcare spending
- 81% of hospital admissions
- 76% of all physician visits, and
- 91% of prescriptions written.<sup>3</sup>

For every \$1 spent nationally on chronic disease prevention, \$445 is spent on medical treatment for chronic diseases.<sup>4</sup> It is estimated that asthma, cardiovascular disease, and chronic kidney disease alone costs West Virginia \$893,778,000 annually. Smoking costs over \$1 billion in lost productivity in West Virginia each year.<sup>5</sup>

Due to the obesity epidemic, as many as 6,955 or **1 in 3 West Virginia** babies born in 2000 will develop diabetes during their lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

If **1 in 10 West Virginia** adults started a regular walking program, the state would save **\$35 million** in cardiovascular disease expenditures annually--- **equivalent to paying the college tuition of 6,374 West Virginia students each year.**<sup>7</sup>

**By 2015,  
one of every  
five dollars will  
be spent on  
health care.<sup>12</sup>**

Within the next decade, obesity related diseases that lead to disability could spur a 10-25% increase in the number of people in need of nursing home care.<sup>8</sup>

The Bureau for Public Health's chronic disease prevention programs have been largely funded by federal grants through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These federal funds continue to decrease while the burden continues to rise.

Without aggressive intervention into the root causes of chronic diseases and their costs, trends like these are expected to continue to worsen.

### **The Power of Prevention – Science-Based Prevention of Chronic Diseases**

While chronic diseases are among the most prevalent and costly health problems, **they are also among the most preventable.**

West Virginia has an arsenal of effective measures within its public health programs that **could** prevent or delay much of the chronic disease burden and curtail its devastating consequences if adequate funding was appropriated.

A comprehensive approach to reducing the burden of chronic disease would include three essential components: disease management, chronic disease prevention, and wellness initiatives.

Disease management is a tool to prevent chronically ill patients from further disease and costly treatments, and also involves patients in managing their own care and thereby freeing up scarce health care resources.

For example, one study found that for every \$1 spent on the arthritis disease management program, \$3.42 was saved in physician visits and hospital costs.<sup>9</sup>

Chronic disease prevention includes regular lifesaving screenings such as early detection of cancers, blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol. It also includes public health education and awareness, as well as tobacco use prevention and secondhand smoke protection.

For the cost of Pap tests for low-income elderly women, about \$5,907 and 3.7 years of life are saved.<sup>10</sup>

While each wellness program is unique, most have components that address physical activity promotion and healthy eating, and are supplemented by various tools to assist in meeting health goals.

The West Virginia Tobacco Quitline has a proven return on investment of over \$7 for every \$1 spent assisting a smoker to quit.<sup>11</sup>

## Investing in West Virginia's Health

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources has determined that the burden of chronic disease could be greatly reduced with at least \$30 million in funding from a tobacco tax increase.

Implementation of effective and cost efficient comprehensive state chronic disease prevention and control programs is **essential** for progress – increased resources will not only improve the health and quality of life for State residents, but will actually save the State money in the long run.

**Preventing or  
delaying illness  
and death from  
chronic disease  
is possible.**

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<sup>1</sup>West Virginia Health Statistics Center, 2006.

<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>3</sup>Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2001, cited in *Chronic Conditions: Making the Case for Ongoing Care*, September 2004 Update, a chartbook published by Partnership for Solutions: Johns Hopkins University and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ([www.partnershipforsolutions.org](http://www.partnershipforsolutions.org))

<sup>4</sup>Chronic Disease Directors. *Chronic Disease Burden and Expenditures in the United States: A Report from State and Territorial Health Agencies*. McLean, VA: Chronic Disease Directors; November 2004.

<sup>5</sup>West Virginia Health Statistics Center, 2006.

<sup>6</sup>National Governors Association. *NGA Report on Healthy Living*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 2006.

<sup>7</sup>National Governors Association. *NGA Report on Healthy Living*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 2006.

<sup>8</sup>National Governors Association. *NGA Report on Healthy Living*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 2006.

<sup>9</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>10</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>11</sup>West Virginia Division of Tobacco Prevention.

<sup>11</sup>West Virginia Bureau for Public Health, Division of Tobacco Prevention.

<sup>12</sup>Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, *National Health Care Expenditure Projections: 2005-2015*, accessed at [www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalHealthExpendData/downloads/proj2005.pdf](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalHealthExpendData/downloads/proj2005.pdf).