

Most Important Disparity Reducing Advances in US Healthcare and Public Health

DRA Project Report 06-08

In an effort to reduce health disparities in the US, the Disparity Reducing Advances Project considered the question what are the “**most important**” disparity reducing advances in the US in health care and public health? To answer this question, the DRA project reviewed the literature and reports that consciously made recommendations regarding what is most important. Three main points emerged.

- **Prevention And Reversal Of Obesity** in poor and marginalized populations is essential to reducing health disparities. Obesity is an underlying factor in many of the highest disparity diseases.
- **Addressing Social Determinants of Health** is the most vital factor to accomplishing the prevention or reversal of obesity. Specifically, the **general social and economic environment** (reducing poverty, ensuring meaningful employment with living wages and education) and reversing **the obesogenic environment** (promoting sustainable agriculture, safe, active living environments and culturally appropriate social norms and diets); **individual and family level approaches** to food, physical activity and weight control; and **health care approaches** to pre-diabetes screening and early diagnosis (quality management of diabetes and obesity, including the chronic care model and appropriate financial incentives) are the key elements that emerged in the review of the literature as the most effective ways to reduce health disparities related to obesity.
- **Focus on Heart Disease, Diabetes and Cancer** since the same factors that prevent and reverse obesity can prevent, reverse or slow the progress of these three high-disparity chronic diseases. There are some differences at the level of health care among the three, but overall remarkable consistency. And by implication the greatest leverage is not at the level of health care but in the social and economic environment.

The DRA project recommends, based on the findings of this report, that policy makers, health organizations, and communities focus on prevention and reversal of obesity and key chronic diseases by focusing on factors in the social environment, the individual and family level and through health care – but particularly at the level of the social and economic environment.

The full report is available at: http://www.altfutures.com/DRA/Most_Important_Advances.pdf.
For more information on the DRA Project, visit our website at www.altfutures.com/draproject.

“The challenge is not only to anticipate the future, but to create it.”

The DRA Project - Institute for Alternative Futures

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Determinants of Health

Relative importance of factors shaping health
(Premature Mortality)

	1993	2002
Behavior	50%	40%
Environment	20%	
Social		15%
Physical		5%
Genes	20%	30%
Healthcare	10%	10%

Source: 1993 – McGinnis and Foege, JAMA, 1993, 270, 2207-2212;
2002 - McGinnis, Russo, Knickman, 2002, Health Affairs, 21,3,83

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