

A healthier America begins today

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This week, the American Public Health Association is encouraging all Americans to work together to make small changes to their lives to help prevent chronic diseases and communicable diseases to create a healthier America.

From April 2-8, APHA and the Nevada Public Health Association recognize National Public Health Week, an opportunity to empower our families, friends, neighbors and, perhaps most importantly, ourselves to live healthier lives.

Each year, chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes are responsible for millions of premature deaths. Chronic disease causes Americans to miss 2.5 billion days of work, resulting in lost productivity totaling more than \$1 trillion. With nearly 1 million Americans dying every year from diseases that could be prevented, even small preventive changes and initiatives can make a big difference in living healthier lives.

Start small, think big

National Public Health Week begins with a simple premise: If we take small actions, our communities, homes and families will see the large benefits of preventive care and “grow the movement.” These preventive measures, in turn, can help create a healthier nation and reach our goal of becoming the healthiest nation in just one generation.

We face a real and growing public health problem. If we fail to embrace preventive measures to limit chronic disease and early death, the toll, measured in lives lost and health care dollars spent, will only worsen in years to come.

Fortunately, we know that many diseases and deaths can be prevented. If Americans did the simple things — exercised more frequently, had healthier diets, avoided alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, practiced proper hand-washing and food preparation, practiced safe sex and provided proper treatment to those suffering from mental illnesses — we could dramatically reduce the burden of disease and death moving forward, helping to save lives.

For example, reducing foodborne illness by just 10 percent would keep about 5 million Americans from getting sick each year. Cigarette smoking, which is the most common form of tobacco use, causes nearly a half a million deaths and an estimated \$100 billion in medical expenditures in the US each year.

Of course, we can't make significant improvements unless each of us play a part in creating a healthier nation. That means everyone needs to take small steps to improve the well-being and health of their own communities.

In our community, we need to not only address barriers in accessing basic medical and preventive health services, we must continue to support efforts that prevent disease and disability in the first place.

Join the movement

This week, please join me and my colleagues in the Nevada Public Health Association in working to make Washoe County and northern Nevada a healthier place to live, work and raise a family. Improved understanding of the measures we can take to live longer lives is the first step in helping us create a healthier state and nation.

To learn more about the importance of taking preventive measures in our community and to join the movement for a healthier America underway during National Public Health Week, visit www.nphw.org.

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