

Celebrate National Public Health Week

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Since 1995, when the first full week of April was declared National Public Health Week, communities across the United States have observed this annual event as a time to recognize the contributions of public health and highlight issues that are important to improving the health of our nation.

This year, NPHW 2014 will take place from April 7–13 and focus on guiding communities through the evolving public health system with the theme “Public Health: Start Here.”

This year’s event stresses the fact that creating a healthier nation requires each of us to take small steps to improve both individual and community health. In Nevada, we must continue to not only address barriers in accessing medical care when it is needed, we must participate in local efforts to prevent disease and disability in the first place.

Public health begins with a simple premise: If we take small actions, our communities, homes and families will see the large benefits of prevention and “grow the movement.” Preventive measures, in turn, can help create a healthier nation and reach public health’s goal of becoming the healthiest nation in just one generation.

Today, seven in ten deaths in Nevada are related to largely preventable chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. Moreover, 75 percent of our health care dollars are spent on downstream measures to treat such diseases. Fortunately, we know that much of the premature death and disability associated with chronic disease can be prevented.

If we did simple things — exercised more frequently, had healthier diets, avoided alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, got recommended screening tests, 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.

We also know that modest investments in public health programs to promote healthy behaviors have the potential to improve health outcomes and substantially reduce medical care costs. Nevada currently spends over \$4 billion each year to treat chronic disease – costs

associated with treating heart disease alone are \$1.8 billion.

According to recent research, investments such as the Prevention and Public Health Fund have the potential to improve health outcomes and reduce costs. For example, every 10 percent increase in funding for community-based public health programs is estimated to reduce deaths due to preventable causes by 1 to 7 percent.

Another study found that a \$2.9 billion investment in community-based disease prevention programs was estimated to save \$16.5 billion annually within five years. Currently, only three cents of every health care dollar in the US is spent on public health and prevention.

To learn more about the importance of public health and prevention, and to join the movement to create a healthier state and nation underway during National Public Health Week, visit www.nphw.org.

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