



**SOCIETY OF
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Public Health: Actuaries Weighing in on Healthy People 2030

A Health Section Strategic Initiative

By Bethany McAleer, Sara Teppema and Jim Toole

Since the 1980s, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) has set an agenda for improving the health of Americans through its Healthy People initiative. Every 10 years, ODPHP updates its goals and framework for the coming decade. According to the Healthy People website:¹

Healthy People has established benchmarks and monitored progress over time in order to:

- Encourage collaborations across communities and sectors
- Empower individuals toward making informed health decisions
- Measure the impact of prevention activities

In late 2016, ODPHP began work on Healthy People 2030, shaping its vision, mission, foundational principles, plan of action and overarching goals. This work resulted in a report titled *Recommendations for an Approach to Healthy People 2030* and a request for comment on those recommendations.²

Healthy People 2030's vision is a society in which all people achieve their full potential for health and well-being across the life span. The framework outlines foundational principles, a plan of action and goals that are admirable. However, the Society of Actuaries (SOA) Public Health Task Force (created by the Health Section's Strategic Initiative for Public Health) believes the framework could be strengthened by acknowledging the importance of cost-benefit evaluations in prioritizing and securing resources to support its initiatives. The members of the task

force were inspired by the goals of Healthy People 2030, and we recently provided a comment letter on the framework.

Our comment letter discussed the fact that actuaries' data-driven view of health and health care calls us to quantify the costs of programs and services as well as the downstream savings that various investments can generate. We believe that this objective view is sometimes missing from the clinical and public health discourse, and yet it is a view that is absolutely necessary for informed decision making. Applying a return-on-investment approach to clinical and public health initiatives allows decision makers to identify programs that are working effectively and could be expanded as well as those that may need to be revised. Without that view, money could continually be invested in programs that aren't generating expected results.

The SOA Public Health Initiative has a subgroup to enable networking among SOA members and friends who are interested in engaging in discussion on public health and population health topics. We have some planned activities, such as periodic conference calls, a group on SOA Engage (<https://engage.soa.org>), sessions at the SOA June Health Meeting and a web-exclusive series of articles on www.theactuarymagazine.org. Please join us by reaching out to Dee Berger (lberger@soa.org).

In addition, public health systems in general struggle to ensure steady and sufficient funding for their initiatives, as most of the money that supports public health is discretionary funding. Until there is widely accepted evidence of the financial benefits of public health programs, initiatives such as Healthy People 2030 will not receive the prioritization and financing needed to fully reach their goals. For this reason, we strongly recommended that the framework explicitly reference the importance of cost-benefit evaluations to help secure continued funding for its clinical and public health programs with demonstrated financial value. We also recommended that the framework expand its goals to include the promotion of the impact that prevention, wellness, safety and health equity initiatives can have on overall U.S. health care spending.

We hope that the Healthy People 2030 Committee will consider our comments and add a cost-benefit lens to its admirable framework in order to better ensure the sustainability and expansion of the great work that health and health care professionals do every day. ■



Bethany McAleer, FSA, MAAA, is a consulting actuary with Axene Health Partners LLC in Reston, Virginia. She can be reached at bethanymcaleer@axenehp.com.



Sara Teppema, FSA, MAAA, is divisional vice president and actuary, Enterprise Network Solutions, at Health Care Service Corporation in Chicago. She can be reached at sara_c_teppema@bcbsil.com.



Jim Toole, FSA, CERA, MAAA, is a managing director, life & health, for FTI Consulting Inc. in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He can be reached at jim.toole@fticonsulting.com.

ENDNOTES

- 1 About Healthy People, *HealthyPeople.gov*, <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/About-Healthy-People>. Last updated December 4, 2017 (accessed December 5, 2017).
- 2 “Secretary’s Advisory Committee on National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives for 2030: Recommendations for an Approach to Healthy People 2030,” May 9, 2017, *HealthyPeople.gov*, https://www.healthypeople.gov/sites/default/files/Full%20Committee%20Report%20to%20Secretary%205-9-2017_1.pdf (accessed December 5, 2017).



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