

INTRO



Introduction

Increasing health care costs, lack of health insurance and deaths due to heart disease, cancer and diabetes dominate the news. Although these health issues are important and we need to address them through greater integration of health care services, improved efficiency, greater health care coverage and expanded access, it is not sufficient to view health only in terms of disease and suffering. We believe there are significant opportunities for our communities and the public to invest in health promotion and disease prevention. To invest in health promotion is to assume a leadership role to address these issues through population-based changes focused on prevention. To succeed, we must first understand health promotion and its benefits, the current health of Denver residents, and the health disparities among different populations.

This report is designed to inform Denver leaders, the media, community-based organizations and residents about health and opportunities to impact Denver's health status. It offers a foundation upon which we can all build to address the health of Denver residents in an informed, comprehensive and sustainable manner that simultaneously promotes health at the individual program, community, environment and policy levels.

Health Promotion Through Healthy People 2010

Healthy People 2010 (HP 2010) is the National Health Agenda established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Designed to address the most significant preventable threats to health, it establishes national goals to reduce these threats.¹ The framework focuses on goals and objectives to be accomplished by 2010. **The goals are to 1) increase quality and years of healthy life, and 2) eliminate health disparities.**

To have the greatest impact upon these goals, *Ten Leading Health Indicators* were chosen to reflect the major health concerns in the United States:²

- Overweight and Obesity
- Physical Activity
- Tobacco Use
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Health
- Responsible Sexual Behavior
- Violence and Injury Prevention
- Environmental Quality
- Immunizations
- Access to Health Care

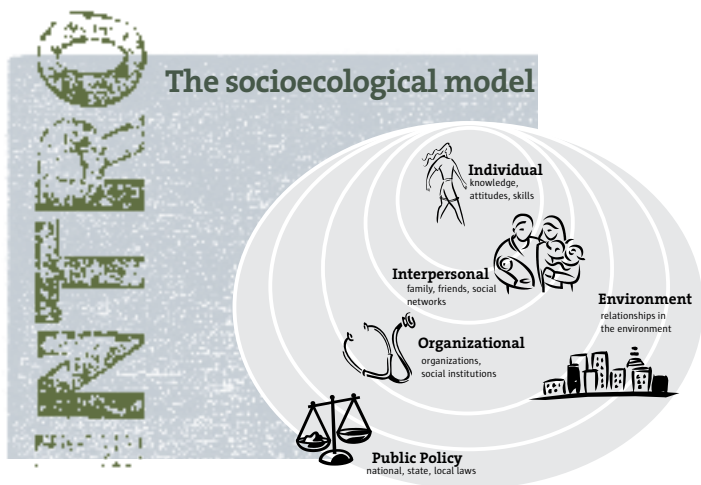
Health promotion is the systematic process of promoting the health of populations. There is an old story about a man who sees someone drowning in a stream and jumps in to save him. As soon as he does this, he notices even more people in danger coming down the water, and the helper dives in again. Soon, he is exhausted from rescuing everyone, and begins to wonder what is happening upstream to get people into trouble, and what systems can be developed to keep them out of it. Coming up with systems to prevent or solve problems “upstream” is health promotion, and the primary focus of HP 2010.

Health promotion is the science of helping individuals and communities change their lifestyle to move toward optimal health: a balance of physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual well-being. To successfully address optimal health, a comprehensive approach must be initiated, including: 1) health education, 2) establishing interpersonal supports systems, 3) reaching people through changes at schools, worksites, and health care practices, 4) creating communities supportive of health through changes in the physical environment, and 5) developing public policy to support healthier decisions.⁴

Economic savings are often realized by preventing disease before it occurs. However, the benefits of health promotion can be challenging to measure, given that success depends upon disease not occurring and/or limiting the impact of the illness. Health promotion and disease prevention are investments, similar to financial savings. One may not realize the full impact, but it will, ultimately, have a positive impact.

“Leaders are the ones who keep faith with the past, keep step with the present, and keep the promise to posterity.”
~ Harold J. Seymour

Note: As you look at each of the individual health indicators, there are many positive trends. For example, deaths due to cardiovascular disease, cancer (breast, colon, and lung), diabetes, motor vehicle accidents, infant mortality, and HIV/AIDS have all decreased over the past six years. This is very positive trend that we need to continue.



Understanding the Data

Population data capture the past (where we started), keep step with the present (our current situation), and can project our proximity to future posterity (project future trends without intervention). Denver population data are representative of all Denver residents, or all members of a particular population within Denver. Through these data, we identify areas of health on which we need to focus and specific populations on which to focus health promotion. Additionally, we can look at the root causes of poor health, such as the behaviors and environments related to a greater health burden.

Health Disparities

As we strive to change health trends, we must focus on those populations disproportionately affected by poor health. By changing the health status of these populations, we will have a greater effect on the entire population. Health disparities are differences in health status that occur among population groups defined by specific characteristics. For policy purposes, characteristics are those consistently associated with the largest variations in health, such as income, gender and race/ethnicity.⁵ The relationship between income and health status suggests a relationship between social indicators and health. In the U.S., wealth is the strongest determinant of health.^{6,7} Wealth confers a number of important social benefits strongly associated with health. Benefits include access to social goods such as high quality education, employment, housing, childcare, recreational activities, nutrition, medical care, and safer and cleaner neighborhoods.⁸

We must address these social, physical, psychological and environmental root causes of poor health through our health promotion efforts.

A Strong Foundation

Denver has a strong foundation through which we can utilize these data. In 2000, Denver's public health system envisioned a framework to parallel the national health agenda. Realizing no

single entity can address the health of the entire population, agencies and individuals committed to the health of Denver joined together to ensure a coordinated approach focusing on Healthy People 2010 Leading Health Indicators. The result was the **Denver Healthy People 2010 Coalition**.

The Denver Healthy People 2010 Coalition includes more than 100 organizations. Through partnerships such as these, health promotion efforts can reduce the burden of disease on the health care system. The Denver Healthy People 2010 Strategic Plan establishes a model to successfully implement health promotion through six guiding principles:

- **COLLABORATION**—Improve communication, collaboration and synergy among those working to improve the health of Denver, including traditional and nontraditional partners.
- **DATA**—Build better data systems to capture all of Denver's health data from public and private sources.
- **EDUCATE LEADERS & THE PUBLIC**—Raise awareness among leaders and the public about ways to improve health.
- **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**—Increase financial resources dedicated to health promotion and disease prevention.
- **MULTI-DIMENSIONAL HEALTH PROMOTION EFFORTS**—Use health promotion approaches that address change on multiple fronts including policy, people's economic, social and physical environments, as well as behavior change.
- **ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES**—Address the root causes of poor health, including social, physical, psychological and environmental issues.

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