

August 7, 2007

Dear Colleague:

This report brings attention to the importance of high-value preventive care. This type of care includes immunizations, disease screenings, and counseling services delivered by health care providers—services that produce the greatest health benefits and offer the best cost value based on extensive research to determine the best evidence for what works in prevention. This report documents the shortfalls in use of these health care services and the life-and-death consequences. It also features the mortality impact of under-use of cancer screening services for racial and ethnic populations. This report's singular focus on prevention and health impact data make it unique.

The sad fact is that high-value preventive care is widely underused, and as a result there are millions of people whose lives are shortened or who are unnecessarily sick, who are less productive than they would be otherwise, and who incur expensive medical costs. Closing the gaps in the use of just five preventive services would save 100,000 lives annually in the United States.

For example, increasing the number of adults who use aspirin regularly to prevent heart disease would save 45,000 lives annually. Increasing the percentage of smokers who have had a doctor offer assistance to help them quit would save 42,000 lives annually. These two preventive measures have been recommended by experts for years. Yet the majority of people who need to use aspirin regularly for prevention purposes are not using it, and the majority of smokers who need medical assistance to quit are not getting that help from their doctors. Any effort to reform the nation's health system should have greater use of these and other evidence-based preventive services as a front-and-center goal.

I urge you to read and discuss this report with your colleagues, bring it to the attention of policymakers and those who influence them, and do your part to implement the policies and practices necessary to make improvements.

Sincerely,

Eduardo Sanchez, MD, MPH
Chair, National Commission on Prevention Priorities