

# The Value of Public Health to Our Lives & Pocketbooks



## Quick Facts:

- The U.S. spends far more on health care than any other country, with such costs rising ten-fold from 1980 to 2010 and expected to rise faster than national income during the foreseeable future. However, investing just \$10 per person each year in proven, community-based public health efforts could save the nation more than \$16 billion within five years. That's a \$5.60 return for every \$1 invested.<sup>1</sup>
- Routine childhood immunizations save \$9.9 million in direct health care costs, save 33,000 lives and prevent 14 million cases of disease.<sup>2</sup> Every dollar spent on childhood immunizations alone saves \$18.40.<sup>55</sup>
- Each 10 percent increase in local public health spending contributes to a 6.9 percent decrease in infant deaths, a 3.2 percent decrease in cardiovascular deaths, a 1.4 percent decrease in deaths due to diabetes, and a 1.1 percent decrease in cancer deaths.<sup>8</sup>
- Expanding the diagnosis and treatment of depression has an ROI of \$7 for every \$1 invested.<sup>16</sup> Also, substance abuse treatment has an ROI of \$4–\$7 for every \$1 invested.<sup>17</sup>
- The cost of providing dental care for children enrolled in Medicaid and living in communities without fluoridation is twice as high as for children who receive the oral health benefits of drinking water fluoridation.<sup>5</sup>
- From 1991 to 2006, investments in HIV prevention averted more than 350,000 infections<sup>13</sup> and saved more than \$125 billion in medical costs.<sup>14</sup>

Every day, public health practitioners work to ensure everyone has the opportunity to lead a healthy life. They collect the data that show which communities are at highest risk and where resources are needed most; they convene diverse stakeholders and build the community capacity needed to tackle a problem and sustain efforts over the long term; and they empower communities with the tools, knowledge and resources to make a difference and take charge of their health. As the country's leading voice for prevention and health equity, public health practitioners work in every corner of our communities — the places where health happens and prevention comes to life.

The value of a strong public health system is quite literally all around us — it's in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and the places where we all live, learn, work and play. It's in the thousands of people whose lives are saved by seat belts, the young people who say 'No!' to tobacco and the children given a healthy start thanks to vaccines. It is no stretch to say that we are all living examples of the public health return on investment.

In the business world, a return on investment, or ROI, refers to the amount of profit made in relation to the capital invested. In the world of public health, however, ROI is much different. Oftentimes, public health ROI refers to avoided medical spending due to investments in prevention and early disease detection. However, public health ROI should also be measured in the number of diseases and injuries prevented, the number of lives saved and the amount of productivity gained due to investing in public health and prevention.

By adequately supporting public health and prevention, we can transform a health system that's now focused on treating illness to one focused on preventing disease and promoting wellness. And we all have a role to play. By taking small actions, we can help our communities, friends and families see the much larger benefits of prevention.