

# Healthy People 2030: A Call to Action to Lead America to Healthier Lives

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For the past 4 decades, the Healthy People initiative has set 10-year targets to improve the health of the nation. For the next decade, we are launching Healthy People 2030 in the midst of a global pandemic. As COVID-19 has brought the importance of public health to the forefront of our national dialogue, it has become clear—now more than ever—that we need programs such as Healthy People that set a shared vision for a healthier nation, with achievable targets that we can work toward together. Specifically, COVID-19 has focused our attention of the pervasiveness and critical importance of health disparities. Too many Americans fall into a high-risk category for COVID-19 due to underlying health conditions that reflect disparities in health, access to care, and underlying social determinants. Healthy People emphasizes the importance of addressing health disparities and improving the health of all Americans, regardless of race, sex, ability, or social-economic status.

When the first set of objectives was released in 1980, Healthy People established the first national framework for tracking progress on prevention strategies over time and has contributed to many seminal public health achievements over the last 4 decades. By establishing a framework that allowed us to compare national measurable objectives for prevention strategies and health outcomes, we were able to track progress over time and gain deeper insights into what works on a national scale. For example, more than 40 years ago when the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released the first

iteration of Healthy People, the death rate from heart disease was over twice what it is today and the death rate from cancer was nearly 30% higher.<sup>1,2</sup>

Part of what makes Healthy People so successful is its collaborative development process. In 2016, HHS convened the Secretary's Advisory Committee on National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives for 2030 Secretary's Advisory Committee, consisting of independent external experts, to help inform the development of Healthy People 2030. The Secretary's Advisory Committee submitted recommendations to HHS Secretary Azar on the Healthy People 2030 framework, including its mission, vision, overarching goals, and plan of action (Table). The Secretary's Advisory Committee also provided recommendations for objective selection criteria that HHS used to identify specific measurable objectives with targets to be achieved by the year 2030. The Secretary's Advisory Committee's work was made available for stakeholder public comment, which HHS used to inform the final framework and slate of objectives, ensuring that Healthy People reflects the nation's health priorities, not just the federal government's health priorities. The Healthy People 2030 vision is "a society in which all people can achieve their full potential for health and well-being across the lifespan." The mission for Healthy People 2030 is "to promote, strengthen, and evaluate the nation's efforts to improve the health and well-being of all people." The overarching goals of the initiative emphasize what Healthy People is striving to achieve and the strategies that will help the nation reach those goals. Key priorities include eliminating health disparities, addressing the social determinants of health, and cross-sector partnership and collaboration. The plan for action describes the steps necessary for both HHS and Healthy People 2030 users to take to ensure that we make meaningful progress toward realizing this vision and achieving our mission and overarching goals.

## Fewer Objectives, Higher Data Standards

When convened in 2016, the Secretary's Advisory Committee was charged with reducing the number of objectives. There is an old adage, often attributed to

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**TABLE****Healthy People 2030 Plan of Action**

Set national goals and measurable objectives to guide evidence-based policies, programs, and other actions to improve health and well-being.

Provide data that are accurate, timely, accessible, and can drive targeted actions to address regions and populations with poor health or at high risk for poor health in the future.

Foster impact through public and private efforts to improve health and well-being for people of all ages and the communities in which they live.

Provide tools for the public, programs, policy makers, and others to evaluate progress toward improving health and well-being.

Share and support the implementation of evidence-based programs and policies that are replicable, scalable, and sustainable.

Report biennially on progress throughout the decade from 2020 to 2030.

Stimulate research and innovation toward meeting Healthy People 2030 goals and highlight critical research, data, and evaluation needs.

Facilitate development and availability of affordable means of health promotion, disease prevention, and treatment.

Peter Drucker, “what gets measured, gets managed.” Reliable data reported in a timely manner are critical to observing trends and assessing progress over the decade. For Healthy People 2030, the Secretary’s Advisory Committee and HHS recognized that in order to more effectively manage and track progress toward the Healthy People 2030 goals, we had to be more focused with our objectives. Healthy People 2030 was carefully developed to prioritize the most critical health issues and produce a narrower set of objectives for the nation. In comparison to Healthy People 2020, which had more than 1000 measurable objectives, Healthy People 2030 includes only 355 measurable (referred to as “core”) objectives. Each of the core objectives selected for this decade has strong, reliable data sources and data-driven targets and is linked to known evidence-based interventions that may be used to facilitate progress toward the target. The data sources used for these objectives meet a set of data requirements that ensure the reliability and accuracy of these data. HHS was also committed to enhancing the rigor of the target-setting method process for Healthy People 2030. Every core objective has a 10-year target with details on the target-setting methodology available at [HealthyPeople.gov](https://www.HealthyPeople.gov).

### Public Health Leadership in Cross-Sector Collaboration

Healthy People is not prescriptive. Communities and organizations can determine for themselves what

objectives are priorities for them and how best to work toward our shared national targets. Healthy People 2030’s refined set of objectives provides a unifying agenda for stakeholders, but maximizing the initiative’s impact will require cross-sector collaboration among federal and nonfederal governmental agencies, public health professionals, and other users. That is why we need public health leadership to continue their efforts to elevate the importance of public health in their communities by building and leading strong cross-sector coalitions that address the social determinants of health—education access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, social and community context, health care access and quality, and economic stability. To aid in this process, for the first time, Healthy People 2030 sets targets for social determinants of health objectives. HHS encourages the public health workforce to use the social determinants of health—and all Healthy People 2030 objectives—as the basis for programs and interventions and track progress against our national benchmarks.

### Public Health Research and Innovation

Not all high-priority national health issues have high-quality national data that can be used to measure and track progress. In addition to core objectives, Healthy People 2030 includes developmental and research objectives that highlight potential emerging issues or important public health concerns for which reliable data sources or evidence-based interventions remain elusive. Developmental objectives represent high-priority issues with evidence-based interventions that do not yet have reliable baseline data. Research objectives represent key opportunities to make progress where there is currently limited research on effective interventions. We encourage public health researchers and academics to help advance these areas of focus, both in expanding the evidence base of effective interventions and in developing reliable data systems to track key public health issues.

### Resources for Public Health Users

The new Healthy People Web site—[HealthyPeople.gov](https://www.HealthyPeople.gov)—offers an enhanced approach to engage users and organize information in a way that is simple, intuitive, and accessible, while also providing users with the tools they need to make progress toward the Healthy People 2030 objectives. Along with our data partner, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics, HHS will deploy new data throughout the decade. State-level, population, and demographic data, along with

data on health disparities, will be available through charts, tables, and visualizations. Public health professionals can access the Healthy People 2030 database of evidence-based resources to find interventions and strategies to implement to achieve the Healthy People 2030 objectives. The new Web site also features a resource for building customizable lists of objectives that the public health workforce can use to curate objectives that are relevant to specific goals. HHS has used this tool to develop a list of all objectives directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic to demonstrate how Healthy People 2030 is adaptable to emerging health priorities.

### **A Vision for the Future**

The year 2020 will be remembered in history as one of unprecedented public health challenges. With Healthy People 2030, we have an opportunity to shape a

better future for America. Imagine an America where we have attained the Healthy People 2030 vision! Not only would we as a nation have better health outcomes, but we would have made substantial progress on eliminating health disparities. A nation where we have achieved Healthy People 2030's vision would have a robust public health system and a population that is more resilient to public health threats such as COVID-19. This may sound like an impossible task for one decade, but I strongly believe that by working together as a nation, we can make this happen.

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