



National Health Council

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About Chronic Disease

Q. What is a chronic disease?

A. A chronic disease, as defined by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, is a disease lasting 3 months or longer. About one-fourth of people with chronic conditions have one or more daily activity limitations¹, often understood as a hindrance or inability to perform major activities in one's life.²

Q. How many people are affected by chronic diseases?

A. Generally incurable and ongoing, **chronic disease affects approximately 133 million Americans, representing 45% of the total population of this country.**³ Each year, **7 out of 10 deaths in the U.S. are due to chronic diseases.** Heart disease, cancer and stroke account for more than half of all deaths each year.⁴ According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, people with chronic conditions receive 56% of recommended preventive health care services.⁵

Chronic diseases touch the lives of every American, one way or another.

Q. What is the economic impact of chronic diseases?

A. A 2007 study reported that seven chronic diseases – cancer, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart disease, pulmonary conditions and mental illness – have a total impact on the economy of **\$1.3 trillion annually.** By the year 2023, this number is projected to increase to \$4.2 trillion dollars.⁶ About two-thirds of the increase in health care spending in the United States is due to chronic diseases.⁷ More than 75% of health care costs are due to chronic conditions.⁸

Chronic disease reaches into our homes, our hearts, and our wallets.

Q. Do children have chronic diseases? Or are chronic diseases a health care issue only for the elderly?

A. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, between 1990 and 1994 the percentage of children under age 18 with chronic conditions that limited any of their activities as a result of the chronic condition, rose from 4.9 percent to 6.7 percent.⁹ In 2007, **approximately 8 percent of children ages 5 to 17 were reported by parents to have activity limitation due to at least one chronic illness or disability.**¹⁰

The impact of chronic disease on the United States is immeasurable.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Prevalence of Doctor-diagnosed Arthritis and Arthritis-attributable Activity Limitation—United States," (2003–2005) MMWR 2006;55:1089–1092, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5540a2.htm>

² Kraus, L., Stoddard, S., & Gilmartin, D. "Chartbook on Disability in the United States, 1996." *National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research* (1996), http://www.infouse.com/disabilitydata/disability/appendices_glossary.php

³ Ogden, CL, Carroll MD, McDowell MA, Flegal KM. "Obesity among adults in the United States—no change since 2003–2004. NCHS data brief no 1." *National Center for Health Statistics*. (2007), <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db01.pdf>

⁴ Kung HC, Hoyert DL, Xu JQ, Murphy SL. "Deaths: Final data for 2005" *National Vital Statistics Reports*; Vol 56 no 10. Hyattsville, MD: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr56/nvsr56_10.pdf

⁵ McGlynn EA, Asch SM, Adams J, et al. "The quality of health care delivered to adults in the United States." *New England Journal of Medicine*, (2003) 348:2635-264.

⁶ R. DeVol and A. Bedroussian, "An Unhealthy America: The Economic Burden of Chronic Disease." *Milken Institute* (2007) Santa Monica, California: <http://www.milkeninstitute.org/publications/publications.taf?function=detail&ID=38801018&cat=ResRep>

⁷ Thorpe, K. "The Rise In Health Care Spending And What To Do About It." *Health Affairs* (2005) 6:1436-1445. Also, Thorpe K, Florence CS, Joski P. "Which Medical Conditions Account For The Rise In Health Care Spending?"

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "The Power to Prevent, The Call to Control: At A Glance 2009" (2009) <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/chronic.htm>

⁹ Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation U.S. Department of Health and Human Services "Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children & Youth" (1997) <http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/hsp/97trends/intro-web.htm>

¹⁰ National Center for Health Statistics. (2007) *Chartbook on trends in the health of Americans*. Limitation of activity: Children (pp. 42–43). Hyattsville, MD: Author.