



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 limitations, often understood as a hindrance or inability to perform major activities in one's life.^{1,2}

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.**² 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.³ According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, people with chronic conditions receive 56% of recommended preventive health care services.⁴ Chronic diseases touch the lives of every American, one way or another.

Q. What is the economic impact of chronic diseases?

A. More than 75% of all health care costs are due to chronic conditions.⁵ Four of the five most expensive health conditions (based on total health care spending in a given year in the United States) are chronic conditions – heart disease, cancer, mental disorders, and pulmonary conditions. However, with respect to per-person costs, cancer is the most expensive and heart disease the second most expensive.⁶

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.⁷

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.⁸ 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.**⁹

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