

America Continues to Come Up Short in Health and Lifespan

In an International Health Perspective, United States Lags Behind Other Nations

By L.L. Woodard | Yahoo! Contributor Network – Wed, Jan 9, 2013

A study requested by the U.S. government, jointly conducted by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, resulted in a report that reveals the state of health and lifespan in the nation continues to fall behind other industrialized nations. The trend is not a new one; it has been ongoing since the 1980s, but at that time the studies concentrated on the latter years of life in America.

U.S. Health in International Perspective

U.S. Health in International Perspective is the name of the report released today. In a quick summarization of the detailed information available, the basic conclusion reached is that although the United States spends more per person than any other nation in the world, its citizens are dying earlier and living their lives in poorer health than their counterparts in many other nations of the world.

Mortality Rate Statistics

In overall causes of death, age-adjusted statistics reveal the United States has the highest rate at slightly more than 500 per 100,000 of all the nations used for comparison -- 16 other nations, including Japan, Australia, Denmark and Portugal.

In the overall mortality rates for deaths caused by noncommunicable diseases, the United States ranked 16th out of 17 nations, with only Denmark having a higher rate than that of approximately 425 per 100,000.

Rates per death caused by injury also revealed America to rank 16th out of 17 nations with a rate of approximately 55 per 100,000.

In the sub-category of deaths caused by self-inflicted injuries, the United States ranked 11th out of 17 countries with a rate slightly more than 10 per 100,000; in this category, Japan ranked the lowest with a rate of 20 per 100,000. The sub-category of deaths resulting from violence reveals the United States to rank the worst of all

the compared nations with a rate of nearly seven per 100,000 -- more than twice the rate of Finland, rated the 16th worse rate at a little more than two per 100,000.

American Health Disadvantages

The report by the National Research Council identified areas of disadvantage in health for Americans that can be pointed to as causes of the poorer health quality and lagging lifespan in the nation, including obesity and diabetes, infant mortality and low birth weight, HIV/AIDS, drug-related deaths, injuries and homicides and adolescent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Read the U.S. Health in International Perspective Complete Report

The full report, numbering more than 400 pages, is available as a free download . Access to a summarized briefing of the full report is available on the report's homepage.

Bottom Line

Dr. Steven Woolf, chair of the department of family medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University and chair of the panel of researchers, stated to The New York Times , "Something fundamental is going wrong." Woolf further stated that the issues go beyond political party or administration. I say, "Amen" to those observations.

I question why it has taken more than 30 years of such studies before health experts became concerned about the state of health and the lifespan of Americans. The underlying issues span race, sex and age and should concern every American, the health care system, and the government. As American citizens we must demand better for ourselves and future generations.