



## ***A BETTER WAY:*** **HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION**

**H**ealth promotion and disease prevention are very effective in addressing health disparities. However, most reports indicate that less than 3% of our nation's health budget is allocated to population-based prevention. As the cost of health care skyrockets, our country remains focused on costly medical treatments as opposed to prevention.

Health promotion and disease prevention are not only the most cost effective approaches to health policy, they are also the most humane. For example, providing immunizations to at-risk populations to prevent sickness and pain is a much more humane approach than attempting to treat someone after they have become ill.

Health promotion can be as simple as providing information about healthy, safe, lifestyles and behaviors. We have the opportunity to do this through our families, communities, schools, medical professionals, and religious institutions. The media and law can be leveraged to promote good health and prevent disease. Recent examples of health promotion projects include an initiative for schools to return physical education classes to their curriculum, laws that ban sugary foods and drinks from school vending machines,

and public education campaigns about the dangers of tobacco use. Making information about healthy lifestyles and diseases available to the public is a low cost action that makes a big difference. From materials about sexually transmitted diseases, to education on environmental health hazards, this information provides a basis for behavior modifications, assistance and diagnosis seeking, and ultimately, a lifetime of good health.

With no coordinated focus on prevention, the United States pays more for health care than any other country in the world. We pay more per capita and we spend a greater percentage of our gross national product on health care. Yet approximately 47 million Americans still do not have health insurance, including 10 million children. Without health insurance, these individuals do not receive the preventive care and information they need to lead healthy and productive lives. But, it makes more fiscal sense, and is more humane, to prevent diabetes rather than treat the disease and its many serious complications.

The Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine will focus on health promotion and disease prevention by developing leaders who will experience and understand the power of prevention and health promotion. These leaders will understand the intersection of personal, community and government responsibility and will be trained to deliver the messages and strategies that work for diverse communities, in a way that is relevant to the people in need.