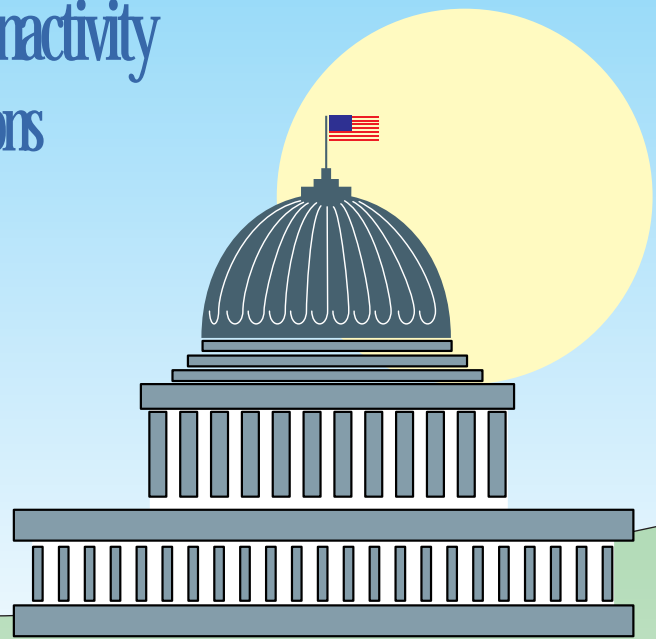
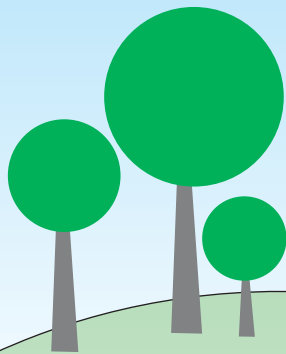




# Charting and Changing the Policy Landscape: Promoting Physical Activity & Reversing Physical Inactivity through Policy Solutions



# Executive Summary

**A Policy Roundtable of National Leaders  
Dedicated to Improving the Public's Health**

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## Policy Brief

# Changing the Landscape of Health and Health Care

## The Empowerment of Americans to Actively Improve Their Own Health

This brief outlines the framework for a new era in American health policy, and an important part of the solution to health care economics and delivery in the 21st century. Organizations from all sectors of society will be asked to play leadership roles in areas of strengths and interests and, eventually, a partnership with Congress and the states will be vital to lasting success. We invite you to join the effort to Empower Americans to Actively Improve Their Own Health, contact: [policy@acsm.org](mailto:policy@acsm.org).

The 20th century saw numerous legislative initiatives in the United States to achieve comprehensive and universal national health insurance. The only partial success was the passage of Medicare and Medicaid in the mid-1960s. All such efforts have focused primarily on the financing and delivery of health care services to treat and manage diseases, a strategy sometimes called “sick care.”

But trends in the 21st century –with the rise in chronic diseases, an older population with families that can extend to four generations, disparities in health and health care access, and growing challenges with cost control – are making this disease-centered approach more problematic and unsustainable. In turn, U.S. health policy solutions are growing increasingly difficult and fragmented.

Yet, amid all of this, the political and social consensus has held that all Americans should have timely access to high-quality, affordable health care. So, there is on the near horizon a policy storm forming that is bearing down on Congress and every state legislature. To avoid or at least effectively navigate that storm, a new strategy must be formulated and implemented.

**This is a call for a different health policy paradigm, a new national effort.** It embraces the reality that policy changes at the governmental and private sector levels can lead to a fundamental reduction in and prevention of chronic diseases.

This is the sine qua non for health care financing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The economic growth of the United States simply cannot keep pace with the rising costs and delivery demands of sick care. The prevention of diseases and the maintenance of health are achievable and of fundamental importance. Further, this call focuses on the powerful potential of lifestyle and behavior changes, stimulated and supported by policy measures.

Finally, this call will concentrate on a particular lifestyle change for which the scientific evidence for its ability to improve health and reduce chronic diseases is certain: **The United States must take more coordinated, integrated, and funded steps to increase levels of physical activity** (and thereby improve health) and reduce physical inactivity (and its related chronic diseases, including coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and osteoporosis).

## The Call to Action

Adequately increasing physical activity and reducing physical inactivity in the U.S. is both complex and simple.

It is complex because it requires a combination of: (a) knowledge of the powerful scientific and medical evidence that demonstrates how increased levels of physical activity would improve the health of Americans and reduce the risks of chronic diseases; (b) the translation of those facts into effective policy solutions for both government and the private sector; (c) the national, state, and community infrastructure necessary to build, coordinate, and support these policy initiatives, and (d) the political and social will to focus on health promotion and disease prevention as an important complement to treatment of diseases, with physical activity being a lifestyle variable that is central to needed progress.

It is simple from this standpoint: Much of the infrastructure and organizational capacity exists, and the steps to achievement can be easily outlined. While this brief will not detail existing infrastructure and capacity, those resources are considerable and would dramatically elevate in effectiveness when aligned with the steps below.

## The Six Keys

**1. National guidelines for physical activity need to be regularly developed, updated, and promoted** so there is a strong foundation of knowledge and awareness for the public as well as needed tools and technical information to be used by medical and allied health professionals. Ultimately, such guidelines need to be developed and issued by a federal agency at regular intervals, similar to the dietary guidelines.

**2. A national educational and behavior change program needs to be developed and implemented** to help make the American people as aware of the link of physical activity to their health as they have become of cholesterol and blood pressure as key factors and health influences. Ultimately, a sustained, well-designed, federally funded program needs to be produced, similar to the cholesterol education program.

**3. A unified, integrated, widely accepted national plan for physical activity needs to be developed and implemented**, so that the strengths and abilities of all sectors of American society can work together with increased coordination, strategic execution, and more effective acquisition and use of resources. Ultimately, this needs to be developed by a broad range of organizations working together under the auspices of a federal agency, with adequate funding for plan development and seed capital for initial stages of the plan's execution.

**4. Biomedical science from the federal level down should emphasize the importance of physical activity and reducing sedentary lifestyles** (and the interplay with other lifestyle choices, such as diet) to health. Ultimately, there needs to be expanded federal focus on and funding for all aspects of research that relate to physical activity and health - and physical inactivity and disease - including basic, medical, behavioral, translational, and outcomes.

**5. Congressional and state legislative agendas should address clear and prioritized science-based health policy goals** that address and fund effective health promotion and disease prevention measures as a complement to historic and traditional health care, with increased physical activity and decreased physical inactivity being central to those agendas. Ultimately, the myriad of bills at both the federal and state levels needs to be refined into core policy solutions that have ample scientific and medical evidence to confirm both effectiveness and net cost-savings to the country and states over a multiyear period.

**6. While progress in health promotion and disease prevention can occur in any setting and is important to all populations, there are seven key targets that are strategically prominent based on urgency and the potential for successful interventions. Ultimately, a combined leadership alignment involving governmental and private sector efforts needs to produce a more coordinated and sustained series of science-based common strategies for key population groups and settings.** These targets are:

## Populations

- (1) Youth
- (2) Older adults
- (3) Racial and ethnic minorities (with special emphasis on those experiencing disparities within health promotion and healthcare)

## Settings

- (1) Schools
- (2) Communities (and their built environment and transportation systems)
- (3) Worksites
- (4) Healthcare

## Active Advocacy

This brief outlines the framework for a new era in American health policy, and an important part of the solution to health care economics and delivery in the 21st century. Organizations from all sectors of society will be asked to play leadership roles in areas of strengths and interests and, eventually, a partnership with Congress and the states will be vital to lasting success. We invite you to join the effort to Empower Americans to Actively Improve Their Own Health, contact: [policy@acsm.org](mailto:policy@acsm.org).

# Participants

## Planning Committee

Russell Pate, Chair  
University of South Carolina

Terry Bazzarre  
Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation

Frank Booth  
University of Missouri

Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko  
National Aging Blueprint

J. Larry Durstine  
ACSM President 2006-2007

William Haskell  
Stanford University

Michael Pratt  
Centers for Disease Control  
& Prevention

Stephen Rice  
Meridian Health

Monte Ward  
Advanced Capitol Consulting

James Whitehead  
ACSM Executive Vice President

Stephanie Garwood  
ACSM Staff

Dan Henkel  
ACSM Staff

Jane Senior  
ACSM Staff

## Roundtable Participants

Katie Adamson  
YMCA of the USA

Audie Atienza  
National Cancer Institute

Doug Billings  
ISA Group

Jessica Donze Black  
American Heart Association

Richard Bland  
YMCA of the USA

David Buchner  
Centers for Disease Control  
& Prevention

John Buzzerio  
Plus One

Donald Christie  
American College of Physicians

John Clymer  
Partnership for Prevention

Stephen Corbin  
Special Olympics International

Paul Couzelis  
MediFit Corporate Services

Bill Day  
MediFit Corporate Services

Karen Donato  
National Heart, Lung,  
and Blood Institute

Tina Dove  
National PTA

Helen Durkin  
International Health  
Racquet & Sportsclub Assoc.

Heidi Ecker  
National Coalition for  
Promoting Physical Activity

Richard Elder  
International Food Information  
Council Foundation

Lynda Flowers  
AARP Policy Institute

Sheila Franklin  
National Coalition for  
Promoting Physical Activity

Naomi Fukagawa  
American Society for  
Clinical Nutrition

Howard Garrison  
Fed. of American Societies  
of Experimental Biology

Marc Goldstein  
American Physical Therapy  
Association

Phil Haberstro  
Wellness Institute of  
Greater Buffalo and WNY

Michael Hargrett  
Lippincott Williams  
& Wilkins

Ken Harwood  
American Physical Therapy  
Association

Lynne Haverkos  
National Institute of Diabetes  
& Digestive & Kidney Diseases

Melissa Johnson  
President's Council on Physical  
Fitness and Sports

Chrissie Juliano  
Trust for America's Health

Robyn Kaplan  
Health Promotion Advocates

Mary Kirkland  
National Athletic Trainers  
Association

Kate Kraft  
Consultant

Craig Masback  
USA Track & Field

Teri McCambridge  
American Academy of  
Pediatrics

David McCarron  
Shaping America's Youth

Douglas McKeag  
Indiana University School of  
Medicine

Thomas Miller  
The Industrial Athlete Inc.

Alfred Morris  
National Association for Sport  
and Physical Education

Suzanne Nottingham  
LEKI USA Inc.

Vito Perriello Jr.  
National High School  
Federation

Orson Porter  
Nike

Charlotte Pratt  
National Institute of Child  
Health & Human Development

Nico Pronk  
Health Partners

Melissa Ranch  
YMCA of the USA

Tom Scanlon  
International Health Racquet  
& Sportsclub Association

Dave Schmidt  
International Food Information  
Council

Laura Segal  
Trust for America's Health

Bill Sells  
Sporting Goods Manufacturers  
Association

Trevor Shilton  
National Heart Foundation of  
Australia

Christine Spain  
President's Council on  
Physical Fitness & Sports

Michael Spezzano  
YMCA of the USA

Pamela Stark-Reed  
National Institute of Diabetes  
& Digestive & Kidney Diseases

Mark Udall  
U.S. House of Representatives  
(Colorado, 2<sup>nd</sup> District)

Monica Vinluan  
National Recreation and  
Park Association

Dan Wexler  
National High School  
Federation

Shannon Wisham  
Institute of Medicine

Carrie Wolinetz  
Federation of American  
Societies of Experimental  
Biology

Alfreda Young  
Cadbury Schweppes



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**AMERICAN COLLEGE  
of SPORTS MEDICINE**  
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