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HHS Releases Assessment of Healthy People 2010 Objectives *Life Expectancy Rises, but Health Disparities Remain*

Today, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a progress assessment of the nation's health goals over the last decade. The report entitled, "Healthy People 2010 Final Review," determined that Americans had met -- or were moving toward meeting -- 71 percent of the program's 2010 targets, including those associated with reducing deaths from coronary heart disease and stroke.

The Healthy People initiative, which aligns itself with several other HHS goals and programs, is grounded in the principle that setting national objectives and monitoring progress can motivate action and improve health. Throughout the United States, health departments at the city, county and state levels use the Healthy People program as a way to track the effectiveness of local health initiatives.

"Our Nation has made significant progress toward meeting Healthy People 2010 objectives," said HHS Assistant Secretary for Health Howard K. Koh, MD, MPH, "But to reduce disparities and achieve true sustainable change in public health, we need to create a 'health in all policies' approach that reaches people where they live, work, play and pray."

"Too many people are not reaching their full health potential because of preventable conditions. Given the renewed emphasis on prevention outlined in the Affordable Care Act, we have a unique opportunity to help all Americans improve both the length and quality of their lives," added Dr. Koh.

Some of the more promising data released in the assessment revealed that the country met the Healthy People objectives of reducing cholesterol levels, while making minor strides toward reducing smoking rates. As a result, according to the National Vital Statistics System, the U.S. is enjoying a major drop in deaths from heart disease and strokes over the past decade. In other good news, the nation's overall life expectancy continued to rise and several objectives that track mental health status, treatment, and services met their 2010 targets.

While much progress has been made with regard to most of the 2010 health objectives, it is clear from the Healthy People assessment that the nation still comes up short in a number of critical areas, including efforts to reduce health disparities and the obesity rate.

Over the past decade, health disparities have not changed for approximately 80 percent of the health objectives and have increased for an additional 13 percent. And, the report found that obesity rates increased across all age groups. Among children aged 6-11 years, obesity rates rose by 54.5 percent, and among adolescents aged 12-19 years, the obesity rate rose 63.6 percent. In addition, the proportion of adults who are obese rose by 48 percent.

"Despite many areas for optimism, addressing health disparities continues to be our greatest challenge," said Dr. Edward Sondik, Ph.D., director of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). "It is

important that we are making progress in improving health outcomes across the board. However, all Americans should be concerned that disparities among people from socially, economically or environmentally disadvantaged backgrounds have generally remained unchanged and actually increased for 13 percent of the objectives, while decreasing for only 7 percent of them. Our hope is that this analysis will help lay the foundation for implementing Healthy People 2020 and the HHS Action Plan to Reduce Health Disparities – roadmaps to better tackle these disparities.”

Reducing health disparities and curbing obesity are top priorities for both the administration and the department. HHS is working across government and with its private sector partners to improve outcomes across all racial and economic groups. To that end, HHS launched the *HHS Action Plan to Reduce Health Disparities* in April 2011 to promote integrated approaches, evidence-based programs and best practices to reduce health disparities. HHS is also working to tackle obesity by partnering with the National Prevention Council to implement the National Prevention Strategy’s goal of increasing the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life, as well as working with First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* campaign to increase physical activity and encourage increased access to healthy foods.

For the past 30 years, Healthy People has provided a science-based framework for identifying and measuring our nation’s public health priorities and efforts. To learn more about Healthy People, please visit www.healthypeople.gov.

The results of the Healthy People 2010 assessment were released today during a webinar, led by Dr. Koh, Dr. Sondik and Connecticut Health Commissioner Jewel Mullen, MD. To access the webinar, go to www.healthypeople.gov

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