Findings from the *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report – United States, 2011*

In recent decades, the United States has made substantial progress in improving our residents' health and reducing disparities, but ongoing economic, racial/ethnic, and other social disparities in health still exist.

Now, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued the *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report — United States, 2011*, which is the first in a series of regular reports that focus on selected topics that are important to CDC's efforts to eliminate disparities.

Released as an *MMWR Supplement*, the report contains 22 topical essays that address disparities in health-care access, exposure to environmental hazards, mortality, morbidity, behavioral risk factors, and social determinants of selected health problems at the national level. The report provides an analysis of the recent trends and ongoing variations in health disparities and inequalities in selected social and health indicators. The data highlight the considerable and persistent gaps between the healthiest people and the least healthy. By documenting these gaps, CDC hopes to spur further action and attention to these issues at the federal, state and local levels.

Key Findings in Cigarette Smoking Disparities

- Data for 1965–2008 indicate declines in smoking among both male and female non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black adult smokers aged ≥18 years. Despite these declines, data for 2006–2008 indicate a much higher smoking prevalence among American Indian/Alaska Native men and women.
- Persons whose household incomes were below or near the federal poverty level had substantially higher prevalence of smoking, compared with persons whose household incomes were above the federal poverty level.
- Smoking significantly decreased with increasing levels of educational attainment.
- Persons who were unemployed also had a high prevalence of smoking.

What Can Be Done

The Institute of Medicine's 2007 report, *Ending the Tobacco Problem: A Blueprint for the Nation,* has demonstrated that comprehensive tobacco control strategies that include population-based policies are effective in decreasing smoking behavior. Implementation of these policy strategies should be adapted to address tobacco-related disparities among specific populations.

CDC will accelerate its efforts to eliminate health disparities with a focus on surveillance, analysis, and reporting of disparities and the identification and application of evidence-based strategies to achieve health equity.

CDC and its partners can use the findings in this periodic report to raise awareness and understanding of groups that experience the greatest health disparities. The findings also can help motivate increased efforts to intervene at the state, tribal, and local levels to address health disparities and inequalities.

Recommended Actions to Reduce Health Disparities

1. Increase community awareness of disparities as persistent problems that represent some of the most pressing health challenges in the U.S.

2. Set priorities among disparities to be addressed at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels

3. Articulate valid reasons to expend resources to reduce and ultimately eliminate priority disparities

4. Implement the dual strategy of universal and targeted intervention strategies based on lessons learned from successes in reducing certain disparities (e.g., the virtual elimination of disparities in certain vaccination rates among children)

5. Aim to achieve a faster rate of improvement among vulnerable groups by allocating resources in proportion to need and a commitment to closing gaps in health, longevity, and quality of life

For More Information
The *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report – United States, 2011* is available online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr. For more information about this topic, please visit www.cdc.gov/tobacco.