

Wisconsin MARPHLI Team - Team Transformers Case Statement Abstract

Argument for Making an Economic Investment in our Public Health System

Though the field of Wisconsin public health has been historically underfunded, this project makes the contrarian case for increasing spending on public health, despite, and because of the current economic crisis.

Currently, Wisconsin's public health spending amounts to only \$6.24 per capita – which ranks 47th amongst all states. While such a low ranking is disconcerting for such a progressive state as Wisconsin, the real concern is the negative impact flat funding and budget cuts continue to have on the overall public health of our citizens.

The costs of the current health care system are the costs of not preventing public health problems. For example, it cost Wisconsin taxpayers \$156 million for teen childbearing in 2004 but \$2.8 billion in estimated cumulative costs with 97,400 children born to teen mothers between 1991 and 2004. (National Campaign) Another example is the problem of influenza pandemic alone; Wisconsin stands to lose roughly \$12 billion, or 5.56%, in its gross domestic product.

This case study will examine the direct and indirect costs of various public health problems as they relate to health care use, hospitalizations, loss of productivity, morbidity and mortality and public health prevention programs in the areas of alcohol, tobacco, nutrition, housing, STD rates, teen birth rates and pandemic flu.

The current economic climate is forcing cuts in public health spending that will actually result in increasing long term spending at a greater rate. Additionally, reductions in essential health services cause delays in responses to critical health issues and declines in health indicators and thus impact the overall health of the community. As the strain on the economy increases, past history reveals that people increase unhealthy behaviors and therefore further increase the burden of chronic disease and other public health issues on society, proving the case for cost effectiveness of public health prevention programs

Economic research also suggests that individuals living in poverty face an increased risk of adverse outcomes, such as poor health, which can lead to reduced participation in the labor market

A good financial investment in public health is a path to economic recovery. Public health is the best bargain. Investing in essential services, screening and prevention services can help break the cycle of costly treatment, escalating health care costs and subsequent financial strain on our most vulnerable populations and help increase the community resilience to everyday health threats, but also in outbreaks and emergencies

Our case study finally aims to develop a resource and guidance to policy makers, partners and stakeholders to help articulate the need to invest adequate funding in the Wisconsin public health system that is as important as the businesses of banks and car manufacturers.