

Promoting Health Through Federal Policies

Healthcare was one of the most prominent issues during the 2008 presidential primaries and fall election. Now, with a new Congress and new administration gearing up to tackle the issue, is the time to actually put “health” into “healthcare.”

When people discuss healthcare, they really mean *sick-care*—ensuring that every American has insurance coverage when they get sick. But the government should be doing all sorts of things to promote health and *prevent* illnesses...and it could do that in the context of health-care legislation.

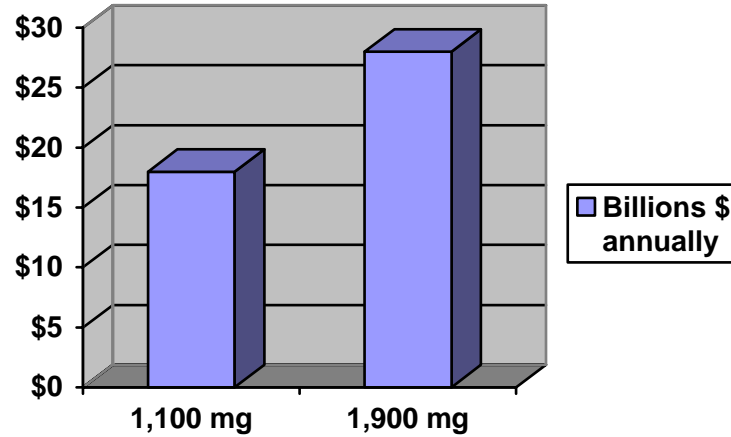
The most attractive measures are ones that would cost little or nothing, but would yield major health benefits. For instance, higher taxes on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages would boost prices, reduce consumption, and save thousands of lives. The billions of dollars in new revenues could be used to promote health or cover the cost of sick-care. A new federal tax on soft drinks could provide revenues to fund healthier-diet media campaigns, bike paths, cooking classes in schools, and inner-city basketball and tennis courts.

Similarly, the government could ban artificial trans fat and quickly prevent thousands of fatal heart attacks annually. Cutting salt levels in packaged and restaurants could save tens of thousands of lives each year, at little cost.

Of course, means of promoting health should also be pursued, notwithstanding their significant costs: hiring more PE teachers, providing healthier school meals, and building clinics in poor urban and rural communities, just to name a few approaches.

High-Leverage Health Promotion

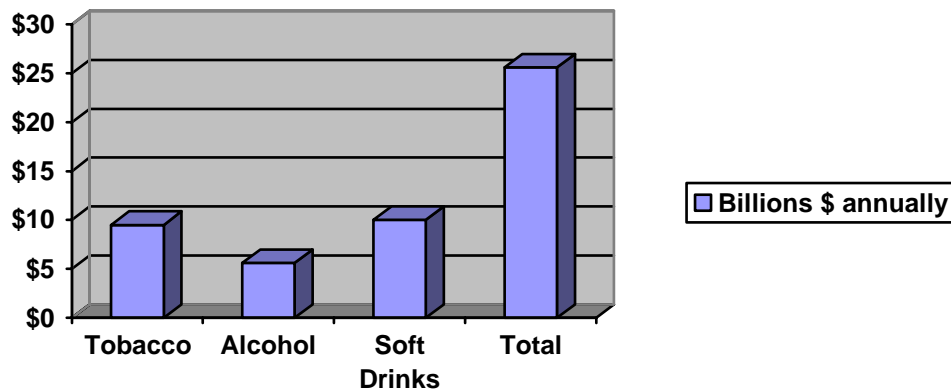
Sodium Reductions Would Cut Medical Costs (Billions \$)



Sodium reduction below average intake of 3,400 mg per day.

(Based on RAND Corp. preliminary study.)

Taxes on Disease-promoting Products Would Generate Revenues to Support Health Programs (Billions \$)

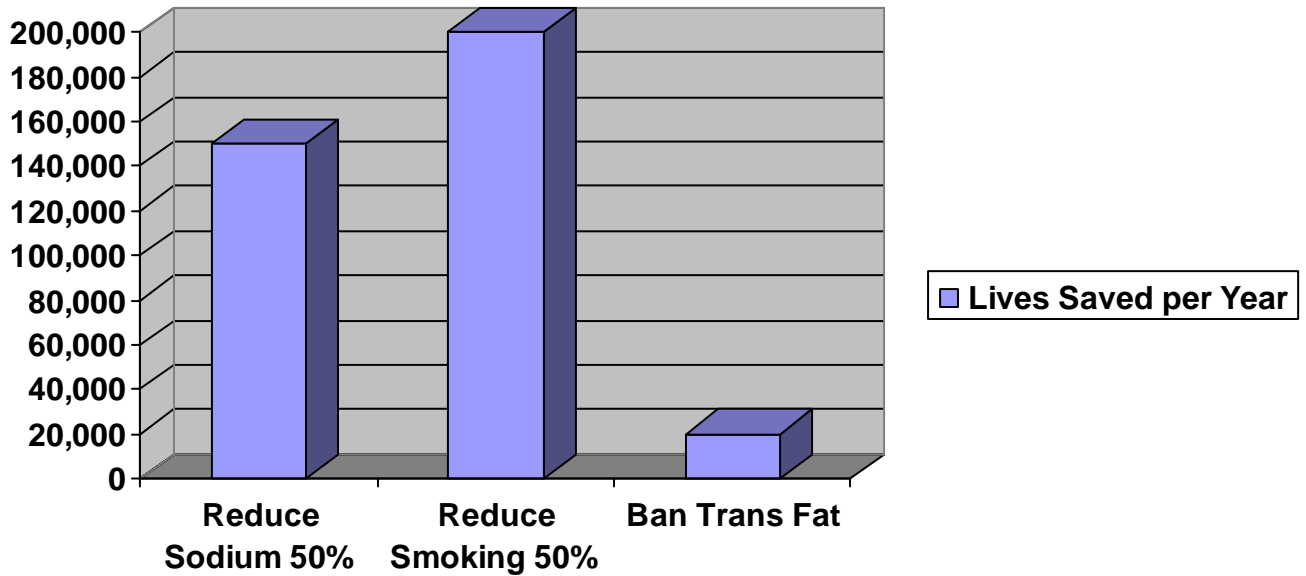


Tobacco: 61 cents per pack: \$9.44 billion (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids)

Alcohol: raising liquor tax to \$16 per proof gallon and equalizing the tax rates on beer and wine: raise \$28 billion over 5 years (\$5.6 billion/year) (CBO)

Soft drinks: 7 cents per 12 ounces: \$10 billion (CSPI)

Regulatory Actions Would Save Lives

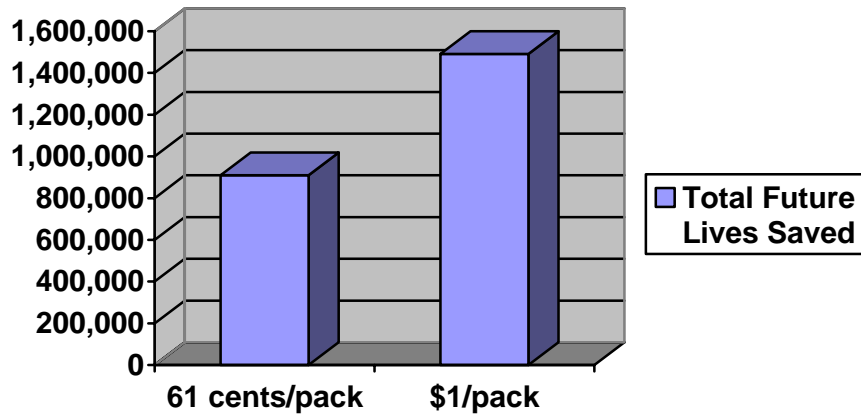


Sodium: Based on Havas, Lenfant, Roccella (AJPH, 2004)

Smoking: Assumes 400,000 deaths/year from tobacco

Trans fat: Assumes that 3/5 of trans has been eliminated; Willett estimated about 50,000 deaths per year

Tobacco Tax Increase Would Save Lives



Source: Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (2007 data)