



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Lifestyle changes needed to reduce illness and health care expenditures

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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An epidemic of chronic disease, combined with a population that is aging and makes unhealthy lifestyle choices, has the potential to radically change the quality of life for our state's citizens and to bankrupt the health care system, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns. These chronic diseases include cancer, arthritis, diabetes, stroke and heart disease.

The Alabama Department of Public Health has prepared a publication titled "Chronic Disease in Alabama: Past, Present, and Future Trends." This document describes the status and trends of chronic disease and associated risk factors in the state and provides county-level estimates of chronic disease prevalence.

"We must address healthy lifestyles to avoid the consequences of poor nutrition, tobacco use and lack of physical activity," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. "By adopting healthier lifestyles and managing existing conditions better, it is possible to improve the overall health of Alabama's citizens. Without this improvement, the health care system will be severely strained and health care expenditures will increase."

Trends in chronic disease and associated risk factors among Alabama adults indicate that the state ranks above the national average in percentages of persons who smoke, are obese, are hypertensive, have coronary heart disease and have diabetes. Further, the percentages of persons who are obese or have been told that they have diabetes are increasing at alarming rates within the state. The number of individuals diagnosed with high blood pressure is also increasing. The state has not observed a significant decline in smoking.

Study results indicate that by the year 2020, it is projected that Alabama will have an estimated

- 942,000 adults who smoke – an increase of 14 percent
- 983,000 adults who are obese – an increase of 21 percent
- More than 1.4 million adults who are hypertensive – an increase of 30 percent
- 381,000 adults with diabetes – an increase of 40 percent

- More than 1.3 million adults with arthritis – an increase of 30 percent

In making these projections normal population growth and the aging of Alabama's population were the sole factors used. The projections were made on the assumption that the age-specific rate of disease would remain constant over the next 20 years.

In the report Williamson concludes that individuals, families and communities must make "vigorous efforts" to reduce the risk of disease and minimize disability which will require both resources and commitment to healthier behaviors.

The report is available on the Alabama Department of Public Health Web site at <http://www.adph.org/ADMINISTRATION/chronicdisease.pdf>.

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