



National Health Council

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About Chronic Diseases

Q. What is a chronic disease?

A chronic disease, as defined by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, is a disease lasting three months or longer. About 40 million Americans are limited in their usual activities due to one or more chronic health conditions.¹

Q. How many people are affected by chronic diseases?

Generally incurable and ongoing, chronic diseases affect approximately 133 million Americans, representing more than 40% of the total population of this country.² By 2020, that number is projected to grow to an estimated 157 million, with 81 million having multiple conditions.³

About half of all adults have a chronic condition, and approximately 8 percent of children ages 5 to 17 were reported by their parents to have limited activities due to at least one chronic disease or disability.^{4,5}

More and more people are living with not just one chronic illness, such as diabetes, heart disease or depression, but with two or more conditions. Almost a third of the population is now living with multiple chronic conditions.⁶

In 2009, 7 out of 10 deaths in the U.S. are due to chronic diseases. Heart disease, cancer and stroke account for more than half of all deaths each year.⁷ According to the New England Journal of Medicine, people with chronic conditions receive only 56% of recommended preventive health care services.⁸

Q. What is the economic impact of chronic diseases?

More than 75% of all health care costs are due to chronic conditions.⁹ Four of the five most expensive health conditions (based on total health care spending in a given year in the United States) are chronic conditions – heart disease, cancer, mental disorders, and pulmonary conditions.¹⁰

A 2007 study reported that seven chronic diseases – cancer, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart disease, pulmonary conditions, and mental illness – have a total impact on the economy of \$1.3 trillion annually. By the year 2023, this number is projected to increase to \$4.2 trillion in treatment costs and lost economic output.¹¹

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