

Public Health Initiatives

Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2288*)

Church teaching

- ★ Behind poor health behaviors we often find social injustice and inadequate social services and insufficient economic opportunities. Roads and transportation influence the appropriate use of health services. The distribution of health care providers influences access to health care. The distance to supermarkets in our rural areas, with healthier food choices, influences whether or not we can shop there. Poor local economies and high unemployment influence the choices workers make to take jobs without living wages or benefits. The lack of healthful alternatives for children and teens may influence some to turn to unhealthy behaviors including substance and alcohol abuse. Inadequate numbers of Spanish speakers among health and human service providers may keep recent immigrants from utilizing services...The well-known association of poverty, health and education does not spring from the spirit of our people but from a culture for which we are all responsible. (*Bishop Bransfield, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston*)
- ★ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (*1 Corinthians 6:19*)
- ★ As individuals we show respect for our own life and dignity when we adopt life styles that enhance our health and well-being. We should seek to reject personal habits that can threaten our health, such as smoking, excessive consumption of food and drink, abusive use of alcohol and drugs, and neglect of proper exercise. (*USCCB, Health and Health Care*)
- ★ The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2290-2291*)
- ★ The mission of Jesus, with the many healings He performed, shows God's great concern even for man's bodily life. (*Pope John Paul II, The Gospel of Life*)

Resources

- ★ **Texas Department of State Health Services** (www.dshs.state.tx.us)
- ★ **Texas Health and Human Services Commission** (www.hhsc.state.tx.us)
- ★ **National Cancer Institute** (www.cancer.gov/)
- ★ **Texas Cancer Information** (www.TexasCancer.info)
- ★ **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** (USCCB) (www.PovertyUSA.org)
- ★ **Catholic Charities USA** (www.CatholicCharitiesUSA.org)
- ★ **Healthier US** (www.HealthierUS.gov)
- ★ **Office of the Surgeon General** (www.SurgeonGeneral.gov)

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The Office of the Surgeon General lists disease prevention as one of its four public health priorities. Disease prevention goals include targeting obesity, increasing physical activity, addressing HIV/AIDS, and reducing tobacco use. These priorities are selected because of the large number of deaths associated with them—70% of Americans die of preventable chronic diseases that are impacted by obesity, such as heart disease, diabetes; and tobacco-related illnesses are the leading cause of death.ⁱ The Texas Catholic Conference supports respecting the dignity of all Texans and providing for their common good by supporting public health initiatives that raise the quality of health for all Texans.

Obesity in Texas

The increasing prevalence of overweight and obese children and adults is a serious concern for Texas. Being overweight increases a person's risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and other serious medical conditions that impact quality of life and have substantial economic consequences for our healthcare system. The economic costs of overweight and obesity in Texas during 2001 were an estimated \$10.5 billion. This includes direct healthcare costs, such as medicines and hospital stays, and indirect costs, such as lost productivity and wages due to illness and death. If the trend in increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity persists, the annual costs associated with excess weight in Texas is projected to reach \$15.6 billion by 2010 and could skyrocket to \$39 billion by the year 2040.ⁱⁱ

Cancer in Texas

Cancer is not a single disease. Cancer represents more than 100 distinct diseases that are all characterized by the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells in the body. Cancer is currently the second-leading cause of death in Texas, and is responsible for one in every four deaths. There is no single known cause or cure for cancer and everyone is at risk. Cancer *incidence* rises with age; adults in midlife or older are the most affected. In Texas, as in the nation, the increasing population of older adults means that more and more people will be affected by cancer. Still, cancer risk, even in the elderly, can be modified; behavioral and lifestyle factors are the leading causes of cancer mortality in the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although there is no guaranteed way to prevent cancer, people can reduce their risk (chance) of developing cancer by:

- not using tobacco products
- choosing foods with less fat and eating more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains
- exercising regularly and maintaining a lean weight
- avoiding the harmful rays of the sun, using sunscreen, and wearing clothing that protects the skin
- talking with a doctor about the possible benefits of drugs proven to reduce the risk of certain cancers^{iv}

ⁱ "Disease Prevention." *Public Health Priorities*. 18 Jan. 2008. Office of the Surgeon General. <<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/publichealthpriorities.html>>.

ⁱⁱ "Texas! Bringing Healthy Back." *Obesity*. 6 Feb. 2008. Texas Department of State Health Services. <<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/default.shtm>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Texas Cancer Plan 2005: a Statewide Blueprint for Cancer Prevention and Control in Texas." Texas Cancer Council. <<http://www.tcc.state.tx.us/texascancerplan/index.html>>.

^{iv} Texas Cancer Information. 23 July 2008. Texas Cancer Council. <<http://www.texasancer.info>>.