

# Chronic Diseases

## Creating Solutions to Prevent and Treat Chronic Diseases



Chronic diseases are among the most common, expensive, and **preventable** of all health problems in the U.S. These conditions which include heart disease, diabetes, cancer, stroke, arthritis, and depression plague millions of Americans—causing lifelong disability, diminished quality of life, and ultimately death. Not only are they costly on multiple levels to the individual sufferer, but they exert a hefty price on the nation—more than 75 percent of our health care dollars goes towards caring for people with chronic diseases. Preventing chronic diseases takes a **multipronged approach** (or multiple strategies) within and outside of the health care system.



### Solutions Begin with Research

Abt Associates conducts rigorous studies and evaluations to inform policy and program decisions to improve population health outcomes associated with chronic diseases and facilitate solutions related to prevention and treatment of these conditions across the lifespan—thus, laying the foundation for national, state and local policy and program decisions.

### Questions Abt Is Answering

#### Does the New York City Health Bucks Program increase consumption of fruits and vegetables in low-income neighborhoods?

The New York City Health Bucks program is a pioneering farmers' market incentive program intended to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables among New York City residents. To assess its impact, Abt Associates conducted an evaluation which included a household survey, focus groups, key informant interviews and other methods of gathering data. Abt's research, completed for CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity, revealed that the program model was positively viewed by respondents and that it was associated with higher vegetable and fruit access and purchases in low-income neighborhoods.

#### Is VHA Cancer Care Better than Private Sector Care for Older Men?

Abt Associates, in collaboration with Harvard Medical School's Department of Health Care Policy, collected and analyzed data on men 65 and older diagnosed with colorectal, lung and prostate cancer or lymphoma or multiple myeloma and treated in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) from 2001 to 2004. The team compared this data with data from similar Fee-for-Service Medicare enrollees being treated within the same time frame. The results, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* as well as other journals, revealed that VHA's cancer care for these men was comparable to, or better than cancer care provided to Medicare beneficiaries through the private sector. The findings also showed that veterans treated for cancer in the VHA also had longer or equal survival times after a cancer diagnosis compared to the Medicare beneficiaries.

#### What Impact Do Multiple Chronic Conditions Have on the Nation?

Eighty percent of Americans ages 65 and older have at least two chronic physical or behavioral health problems—contributing to a major public health issue linked to suboptimal health outcomes and mounting health care costs. This reality has triggered a national shift to focus on the costs and treatment implications for individuals with multiple chronic conditions.

## What Is Already Known About Multiple Chronic Conditions?

Abt Associates developed two white papers for the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to help inform the national research agenda for studying multiple chronic conditions and guide development of program initiatives throughout DHHS. The papers describe existing data systems and datasets that can be analyzed to improve approaches to identifying and studying less prevalent combinations of chronic conditions in MCC populations and multiple chronic conditions within populations affected by disparities. This work will help shape the delivery of healthcare services to over 21 million Medicare beneficiaries with two or more chronic conditions.

## What Can Be Done to Advance the Field of Multiple Chronic Conditions Research?

The Multiple Chronic Conditions (MCC) Research Network, funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), was designed to expand comparative effectiveness research and develop infrastructure (mainly integrated datasets) to help optimize care for patients with MCC. Abt Associates led a Technical Assistance Center (TAC) to support AHRQ's MCC Research Network. The TAC facilitated collaboration and learning across Network investigators and developed materials to translate and disseminate research findings. This work involved coordinating four in-person meetings with Network investigators, facilitating 14 webinars, constructing a conceptual model for MCC patient care, developing an infographic and short animated video on MCC, developing an online data archive to make newly developed datasets available to other researchers, as well as a number of other activities.

## What Is a Model Curriculum to Train the U.S. Healthcare Workforce to Care for Patients with Multiple Chronic Conditions?

To equip the U.S. healthcare workforce to meet the needs of individuals with multiple chronic conditions (MCC), Abt Associates is developing an MCC training and education framework as well as model MCC curricula, competencies and modules for both interprofessional and profession-specific audiences. This work for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health at DHHS, being performed with Abt's partner, MacColl Center for Healthcare Innovation, also involves creating a national repository of MCC training and education materials.

## Contact

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