

Updated guide to help policy makers, providers fight cardiovascular disease

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The American Heart Association has released new recommendations for policy makers and public health providers to combat heart disease and stroke on a local level.

The "[American Heart Association](#) Guide for Improving [Cardiovascular Health](#) at the Community Level, 2013 Update"—evidence-based goals, strategies and recommendations for community-based [public health interventions](#)—is published in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation*.

"The future burden of [cardiovascular disease](#), unless we can prevent it, is projected to have an enormous economic impact. Public health goals should focus on developing interventions that help make an individual's default decisions healthy," said Thomas A. Pearson, M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D., the co-lead author of the study.

Maintaining optimal cardiovascular health can "avert the continuing progression of [cardiovascular disease risk](#) in each generation, which continues to demand remedial strategies that are too costly, too limited and often too late," said Pearson, who is senior associate dean for clinical research and director of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry in Rochester, N.Y.

The guide focuses on:

- Changing behaviors such as smoking, [physical inactivity](#) and unhealthy eating habits.
- Increasing awareness of risk factors such as high cholesterol, [high blood pressure](#) and diabetes, and adherence to treatment.
- Identifying community settings from worksites to barbershops that best impact health.
- Specifying the types of interventions—media, organizational partnerships and policy change—that may impact health.

Since the previous guide, issued in 2003, the association has created new goals based on recent evidence that demonstrates the substantial impact of obesity, sodium consumption and air pollution on cardiovascular health.

"The AHA Community Guide offers 125 opportunities to optimize the cardiovascular health where we live, work, play, learn, worship, and stay well. Wherever there is a community, there are opportunities to achieve the AHA 2020 goals to improve cardiovascular health for all Americans," said Latha Palaniappan, M.D., M.S., co-lead author who is associate investigator at the Palo Alto Medical Foundation Research Institute in Palo Alto, Calif. The new guide lists programs that illustrate best practices at national, regional or local levels, striving to achieve the American Heart Association's 2020 impact goals, which are "to improve the cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20 percent while reducing deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20 percent." The focus of the goal is to prevent heart disease and stroke by helping people identify and adopt healthier lifestyle choices.

Provided by American Heart Association

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