

A Dream Come True for Chiropractic: Funding Prevention and Public Health

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Back in 2005, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) said: "Let's face it, in America today we don't have a health care system, we have a sick care system. We wait until people become obese, develop chronic diseases, or become disabled – and then we spend untold hundreds of billions annually to try to make them better." Nearly a decade later, Sen. Harkin has authored a spending package that provides close to \$1 billion for the [Prevention and Public Health Fund](#) (section 4002 of the Affordable Care Act) as part of the omnibus spending bill (H.R. 3547). The U.S. Senate approved the bill on Jan. 16, 2014.

Most chiropractors would agree with Senator Harkin's speech and have probably used those same statements in some context in our practices. It seemed appropriate that the senator from Iowa was bestowed an honorary Doctor of Chiropractic degree by Palmer Chiropractic College in 2002. The senator certainly deserved the degree, as he has been one of the greatest champions for the chiropractic cause and public health.

What Is the Prevention and Public Health Fund?

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the fund is an investment to "help control the obesity epidemic, fight health disparities, detect and quickly respond to health threats, reduce tobacco use..." HHS also has stated the fund will provide programs to tackle primary causes of costly, preventable chronic disease, and prevent accidents and injuries.

To many chiropractors, this seems to be a dream of a funding source. Prevention programs are not just talking points anymore; they are actually fully funded by the U.S. government.

Your Role in Public Health and Prevention

Chiropractors have played an active role in public health and have long helped the nation toward meeting Healthy People 2020's health objectives without knowing it. These objectives include, but are not limited to: (a) reducing activity limitation due to chronic back conditions; (b) improving health-related quality of life and well-being for all individuals; (c) increasing the proportion of physician office visits that include counseling or education related to physical activity; and (d) reducing tobacco use by adults.

[Senator Harkin's](#) omnibus spending bill will fund (fiscal year 2014) \$160 million for preventive health and health services grants; \$10 million in workplace wellness; \$35 million on nutrition, physical activity and obesity state grants; and \$105 million for tobacco prevention.

I already know the answers to the following questions, but let's play along. Have you ever helped someone suffering from chronic back conditions to reduce their activity limitations? Have you improved quality of life and well-being in any of your patients? Do I even have to ask if you have counseled a patient on physical activity and/or encouraged them to stop smoking? You get the point.

Imagine being funded for the preventative care and services you already provide every day in your office through government grants. Now wouldn't it be great if there were an organization through which chiropractors could influence funding for chiropractic preventative care and services? The organization exists. It is called the American Public Health Association (APHA).

How You Can Influence Future Funding Opportunities
Joining the Chiropractic Health Care (CHC) section of the APHA is the best way to get involved. The CHC section was established within APHA in 1995. Today, we have chiropractors on APHA's Governing Council and other top leadership positions.

According to the APHA, the organization is "a diverse community of public health professionals who champion the health of all people and community." It is the only organization that combines a 140-plus-year perspective with the ability to influence federal policy to improve the public's health.

The APHA's core values include "prevention and wellness," "science- and evidence-based decision-making" and "real progress in improving health." In fact, Sen. Harkin acknowledged the APHA's praise of his omnibus spending bill in a speech on the Senate floor.

Since the APHA is recognized by the public as an authority and champion of prevention and wellness, chiropractors in private practice have leveraged involvement with APHA to enhance their credibility to existing and potential new patients. Membership in the APHA also gives you an opportunity to influence public health policy development, network with other health professionals and government agencies, and represent chiropractic interests to the government, industry, the health care system and the public.

The amount of influence the CHC section has on policy-making at APHA is directly related to size of our membership. Currently, the CHC section is made of *less than half of one percent* of chiropractors in the United States. Now imagine if we had even 1 percent or 5 percent of the chiropractic profession as members. Imagine what we could accomplish together to influence public health prevention policies that include chiropractic care.

With the help of Sen. Harkin, the health care paradigm is finally showing signs of focusing on prevention over sick care. As he stated last year while speaking on the Senate floor, "A major purpose of the Affordable Care Act is to begin to transform our current sick-care system into a genuine health care system – one that is focused on saving lives through a greater emphasis on wellness, prevention, and public health."

Join us at the next annual APHA meeting in New Orleans, Nov. 15-19, 2014. Come to participate and network with 13,000 other attendees while having the opportunity to receive CE credit.

There has never been a better time to join an organization that will invest in your future and your profession. For information on all membership benefits and joining the APHA, [click here](#) or contact me via email [see bio below]. For more information about the Chiropractic Health Care section, please visit the APHA homepage and click on "Membership Groups and Affiliates" and then "Sections."

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