



Why WEforum?

Health Overload in an Information Wasteland: Think Again.

By Carolyn DeSena, WEforum Founder and President

Our signature health and wellness conference will teach us how to be our own health advocate and how we can give back and serve our community. As we learn more about our own health, does a social obligation to advocate for the health of others exist? I hope this upcoming article will resonate and inspire you to at least commit to learning how to make informed choices and to pass along valuable information. Learn a little more each month, each week and each day. Share this information with your family and start to make little changes day by day. The results may not be immediate, but there is evidence that these small day to day changes will positively impact your life in the long term. I am not a medical professional, but I do know that with the research our team has produced there is something brewing or rather has been brewing for a while. There is no reason we should wait. It's time to take notice!

We are living in a hyper-tech world, where everything has to happen now and that has changed how we communicate, receive and exchange information. From PTO fundraisers to curing diseases through DNA extraction to artificial intelligence, the advanced technological state of the 21st century has changed the way we accept and trust information. Too much information can be an overload, too much information can create distrust, especially at the speed it is generated and the unfamiliarity of the source. So, here's where we are going to start and sift through some of the basics.

The state of our health on a national scale is quite dismal. I am not going to dissect the political health insurance issue we face in DC, although important, but let's just say DC has it all wrong. This article is not about the blame game, because others before me have done a much better job and other advocates will continue to do the same. Let's just start with the obvious, the facts that have impelled so many including WEforum and its members.

The United States alone spends nearly 18% of its Gross Domestic Product on health care and within a decade, we will reach 20%. Nearly 20 cents of every dollar will be spent on taking care of sick and dying people with chronic illnesses that are mostly preventable. We won't spend that money on education, technology advances in research, innovation, invention, bettering our urban neighborhoods, free college education, creating jobs, etc. We have the best medical care and quality care in the world, and yet we lead the world in many preventable illnesses. So, what is causing this burden on our system and causing so many people to get sick?



Have you ever driven through a low-income community and noticed the restaurant options? Have you ever seen a heat map showing where obesity is most prevalent? According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity is on the rise where one in three Americans are obese, one in five children are obese and nearly eight million people in this country have diabetes and they don't even know it yet. So where is obesity most prevalent? You guessed it, in low-income areas where sources of good, nutritious foods are not readily available. In the United States alone, approximately 23.5 million people live in food deserts and half of them are low income. What is a food desert? According to the American Nutrition Association, food deserts are parts of the country lacking in adequate supply of fresh fruits and vegetables. Low-income residents have less access to transportation, so getting to a grocery store that has better food options is not always likely. Income inequality breeds food inequality. Food inequality is not just about food quantity and the lack thereof, but about the quality of food and whether or not it's nutritious and beneficial to your overall health.

According to the World Health Organization, Americans suffer from chronic illnesses at a rate of 50%. One in two people die from a chronic illness; a high majority of them can actually be averted with better lifestyle choices or what I would call "behavior modification." Can that be true? It's very complicated and the research runs deep, but on the surface, the answers that actually make sense are simple. First, we have a lenient FDA that allows more toxic chemicals into our food supply and products than other developed countries. Europe, for example, doesn't allow nearly 1,400 toxic chemicals in their products and the FDA has a giant loophole in their food-safety designation that allows nearly 3,000 additives to pass without any kind of review. These additives are designated as GRAS or "generally recognized as safe." "Generally"?

Healthcare statistics are a dime a dozen and the numbers are always increasing, whether it be dollars spent or deaths attributed to chronic illnesses. The top four causes of death are alcohol and tobacco use, lack of physical activity or poor nutrition. In 2012, nearly 117 million people had one or more chronic health conditions. 50% of adults don't meet recommendations for aerobic physical activity. Americans aged two and older consume too much sodium which can increase their risk of high blood pressure. The list goes on and on and on. It's exhausting.

Our culture is plagued by the stigma of cost and time. "It's too expensive to eat better." "It takes up too much time to prep." When did eating well become atypical? It's like having good grammar. How can you teach good grammar in school if it's not practiced outside of school and at home? The same goes for good nutrition. You have to practice it all the time, make it a part of your lifestyle and it should be the norm. We shouldn't have to fight so hard for doing what is right. Consistency is practice. Practice leads to better outcomes and although we aren't striving for perfection, we hope for enough change to lower the rate of chronic illness.

Why do we wait to get sick before we start to change our lives? When someone gets sick, whether it's an autoimmune disorder, diabetes, a heart attack, hypertension, thyroid issues, the list goes on; why do we then wise up and start to make changes with our diet? Isn't that a big clue? Have a heart attack, change your diet. Get diabetes, change your diet. Get cancer, change your diet. Our biggest clue is if food can heal us or at least maintain a state of reversal, increase better health status through better nutrition, then why aren't we doing it as a way of life? What are we waiting for? There is an enormous amount of research out there and it's getting better every day. The value of nutrition based on new research is becoming more popular or rather mainstream; for example, better nutrition can help children with ADHD diagnosis or some sensory disorders, understanding your gut health can help put your body back into working order, your genetics can unlock the health secrets you may have been searching for, and many more.

The only way we can change the status of the health in our country is to start at home with what we do with our own family and to volunteer or support local non-profits who will work towards creating food *e-quality*. Many non-profits throughout the country support community gardens in under targeted communities, provide free educational health and wellness programs that promote prevention and intervention, support grocery stores on wheels and farmers markets, etc. The best thing we can do for ourselves is to understand where our food comes from and to source them better. Talk about it at the dinner table and hopefully teachers will talk about it at school so that it becomes everyday conversation. I know from personal experience that talking about it has shaped the way my children think about food; they are young and can make better choices knowing what is good for them and what is not. Although we strive for perfection, we aren't perfect. I still dine out having no idea where the food has been sourced, and I still occasionally give my children unhealthy treats. However, I do it less often because now the kids don't beg for it, I pack lunches on road trips and buy my own sourced candy for trips to the movie theater. Those are just some of the things I can do that are easy but impactful. Changing products is not as intimidating as it seems; it takes a moment to decide and the price differential is becoming more and more competitive each day.

This is a real problem for all of us. At some point we will end up paying for this health care epidemic that most people want to ignore or sweep under the rug. Health insurance will NOT fix this problem. We have so much power, so much at our finger tips, it just requires commitment one family at time. Our power is in every dollar we spend. It's stronger than a vote. With every dollar and every purchase, comes real choice. It's sending a message to large food conglomerates and the government that we want something better for our children and our future. The state of the health of our nation is unacceptable. How do you feel about the state of your health?



Help WEforum do more for your community. We want community gardens. We want free health and wellness programs and services that educate and teach local residents on how to make better choices. We want our youth to learn why nutrition is so important to their health. We want to be a leading example on how not to be a statistic. We want you to help us advocate for all community members. **WEforum.**