



## ABOUT THE COMMISSION TO BUILD A HEALTHIER AMERICA

In February 2008, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation launched the Commission to Build a Healthier America – a national, independent, non-partisan group of leaders – to investigate why Americans aren't as healthy as they could be and to look outside the health care system for ways to improve health for all.

After more than a year of study, conducting site visits and hearing testimony from experts, innovators, stakeholders and the public, the Commission issued 10 recommendations for actions to dramatically improve health for all Americans, and especially those who face the greatest barriers to good health.

Most notably, the Commission called for a major sustained increase in funding for high-quality early education and child care to lay the necessary foundation for lifelong good health among America's children and future generations. In addition, the recommendations call for banning junk food in schools, increasing access to healthier foods for millions of Americans, and making significant changes in federal nutrition policy. The recommendations also address ensuring physical activity in schools, creating healthy communities, eliminating smoking nationwide, and improving the accountability of programs affecting health by monitoring and measuring results.

The Commission found that, although much of America's debate on health reform has centered on access to and affordability of care, health has far more to do with how and where people live their lives than with access to medical care. Factors including education, income, race or ethnicity and environment can have an enormous influence on health. In fact, some experts have estimated that just 10 to 15 percent of preventable deaths are directly linked to medical care.

### WHY ACT NOW?

- Some of us can expect to live an average of 20 years less than others, depending on our race and ethnicity and where we live.
- For the first time in our history, the United States is raising a generation of children who may live sicker and shorter lives than their parents.
- While we spend more than \$2 trillion each year on health care – one sixth of GDP and more than any other country – our health continues to fall short. In life expectancy and infant mortality, the United States ranks near the bottom in comparison with other industrialized nations.
- Health care reform alone will not make the United States healthier. For too long, America has focused on treating disease. In order to be healthy we must prevent people from getting sick in the first place.
- Poor health limits the productivity of our citizens. Nearly one in three poor adults is limited by chronic illness. And when people are sick, they can't do as well at school, at home, or at work.
- On average, Americans who graduate from college can expect to live five years longer than those who do not complete high school.

Good health requires that individuals take responsibility for themselves and their families, but not everyone has the same opportunities to make healthy choices. The Commission's recommendations – which focus on how and where people live, learn, work and play – are a call for all Americans to take responsibility for their own health and for leadership across the nation to promote greater opportunities for every one of us to live healthy and productive lives.

Improving health in America will require substantial collaboration among leaders from all sectors – child care, education, nutrition, housing, community planning and transportation, government and philanthropy – including some who may not always take into account how important their roles are in improving health.

For more information about the Commission, including a list of Commissioners, the recommendations and full report, *Beyond Health Care: New Directions to a Healthier America*, please visit [www.commissiononhealth.org](http://www.commissiononhealth.org).