

## HEALTH RELATED BEHAVIORS AND PRACTICES

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Personal habits, behaviors and attitudes are private matters with public consequences. They also present potentials to restrain health development. Lifestyles are responsible for a large share of diseases and disability that drain resources that could otherwise go to better development pursuits.

Attitudes and practices of the individual, families, communities, business and industry wield significant influence on the health status of the population. Careless waste disposals of individuals multiplied in million households all over the country is a scenario repeated daily and can only result in dire health consequences and adverse environmental condition. Cigarette smoking which is a private indulgence, affect not only the lungs of the smoker but much more the innocent people within the radius of its deadly smoke. Excessive food intake, especially of the wrong kind, results in obesity and chronic diseases associated with it. All taxpayers, including the healthy, pay for such unnecessary consequence of a personal indulgence.

Requirements to protect workers and the public from potentially harmful industries and manufacturing processes are considered financial burden and can lead to vigorous oppositions to efforts to promote health, prevent work-related diseases, injuries and disabilities. Reckless disregard for safety measures in homes, schools, workplaces and even in the confines of ones vehicle results in injuries, disabilities and death. The lack of knowledge on the other hand of preventive measures and consequences of certain health related practices results in wrong choices and decisions that ultimately affect a person's health and general well-being.

These obstacles are too apparent to miss and present challenge to health development, but they also provide the perfect opportunities to facilitate better health. Programs and services in disease prevention, health promotion and protection can be effectively anchored on social and behavioral factors to ensure positive results and critical impact.

Behaviors, attitudes and habits are acquired characteristics and by their very nature could be changed or eliminated through information and strong motivation.

Personal choices and decisions are influenced by knowledge or lack of it, and the awareness of the consequences of such actions. For example, food choices are determined by the nutritional knowledge of the person who buys and prepares them. Other factors include personal and family preferences and the influence of adver-

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tising practices. These factors could be addressed by initiatives that promote good food consumption habits. Parents on the other hand can enhance (over generations) opportunities for their children's health by fostering healthy habits such as proper diet and nutrition, personal hygiene and sanitation, encouraging the development of effective maternal and child health programs by actively participating in their implementation, supporting school health activities and initiating and enjoying recreational activities with children. These are simple and practical health-seeking behaviors that should be promoted and initiated early in life.

Maintenance or improvement of the physical fitness of adults and the elderly effectively prevents risk to fatal degenerative diseases, ensures productive life and increases longevity. Regular physical exercise contribute to this state of well-being and need not be rigorous and intense. Physical exercise should be an enjoyable and entertaining regular pursuit and could take the form of dancing, brisk walking, light sports that allow the movement of body parts or play with younger members of family, tending ornamental plants or vegetable plots and other household chores. Children should be encouraged to take up outdoor games, sports that promote physical development and foster sportsmanship and camaraderie for their own physical well-being. Providing safe recreational environment and activities for young people prevent drug and substance-induced pleasures.

Families and communities can influence factors that contribute to risk-taking and abusive behaviors that lead to violence and accidents. Families should provide the first safe haven and nurturing environment for the young to prevent them from seeking outside "care," wrong values and negative influence. A confused young person without the strong anchor of family and well meaning friends may seek wrong companies, express negative emotions through abusive behaviors, or be unnecessarily exposed to life of crime and violence. It is important that families and communities are tapped for advocacy and information campaigns and community projects that will reduce negative behaviors and practices that impact on health.

People will continue to decide what food to eat and amount to consume, whether or not to smoke or indulge in that "one" drink of alcohol, to walk the two blocks or take an expensive ride. The young will be seeking new experiences, for some, including exploring the highs brought by drugs or alcohol. Advertising tempts the young to taste that first cigarette smoke that usually ends as a habit. These are windows of opportunities for educating and enhancing people's knowledge and making them aware of the consequences of their decisions since each of these decisions will influence the length of people's lives and their capacity to enjoy it.