

Surgeon General's Perspectives

THE MILLION HEARTS™ INITIATIVE: PROGRESS IN PREVENTING HEART ATTACKS AND STROKES

We have good tools to prevent and treat heart disease and stroke, but they're not used enough. That is why, a year ago, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) along with a number of public and private partners launched Million Hearts™, an initiative that aims to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes by 2017.¹

The initiative has taken strong aim at cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke, which is the leading cause of death (responsible for one of every three deaths) in the United States. Together, heart disease and stroke kill more than 800,000 Americans and cost the nation approximately \$444 billion each year. One out of every six dollars spent on health care is for treatment of cardiovascular disease, but those who are treated aren't "cured." Many continue to suffer from serious illness, disability, and decreased quality of life.²⁻⁴

Fortunately, Million Hearts is attacking this burden of illness and the associated social and economic costs through the approach to better health and well-being of the National Prevention Strategy—integration of clinical and community preventive services, empowered people, and elimination of health disparities. This comprehensive effort also emphasizes strong public/private collaboration. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services are co-leaders of the initiative within HHS, working alongside other federal agencies including the Administration on Community Living, National Institutes of Health, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Food and Drug Administration, and Veterans Administration. Private partners include the Y (YMCA), American Heart Association, America's Health Insurance Plans, American Pharmacists Association, Ohio State University, American College of Physicians, and American Nurses Association.

In its first year, the Million Hearts initiative has made tremendous progress in raising awareness among health-care professionals, patients, and communities about how they can help reach the goal of preventing one million heart attacks and strokes by 2017. Emphasis continues in two areas:



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1. Reducing the number of Americans who need blood pressure or cholesterol treatment by empowering them to make healthy choices, including:
 - Not starting to smoke,
 - Being more physically active, and
 - Reducing their intake of sodium and trans fats
2. Improving care for people who need treatment by focusing on the "ABCS" of heart attack and stroke prevention:
 - A—Aspirin therapy as appropriate
 - B—Blood pressure control
 - C—Cholesterol management
 - S—Smoking cessation

Controlling blood pressure was a primary focus in the initiative's inaugural year, which included the following activities:

- In May, Million Hearts promoted the Community Preventive Services Task Force's new recommendation that team-based care improves blood pressure control. The Task Force's review of 77 studies showed that patients' control of blood pressure

improved when their care was provided by a team of health professionals—including nurses and pharmacists—rather than by a single physician.⁵

- In September 2012, CDC published the latest data on the toll that hypertension takes among Americans. *Vital Signs: Awareness and Treatment Among U.S. Adults with Uncontrolled Blood Pressure* stated strongly that putting blood pressure control “front and center” for individuals, health-care providers, and health-care systems is the key to better control and reduced risk for heart attack and stroke.⁶
- Also in September, CDC launched the Team Up, Pressure Down campaign in support of Million Hearts to increase the number of pharmacists who provide advice, especially tips on taking blood pressure medications as prescribed, to their customers with high blood pressure. In addition, it aims to increase customers’ awareness about the importance of asking the pharmacist for help with taking medications.

In 2012, public and private partners of Million Hearts emphasized a variety of the initiative’s elements, ranging from educating consumers about heart health to sharing best practices of state health departments, private health systems, and others.

- The American Heart Association continued to support monitoring progress in achieving the initiative’s goals and to offer consumers access to heart health management tools, including Heart 360[®], My Life Check[™], and the Heart Attack Risk Calculator.
- The Commonwealth of Virginia launched Million Hearts[™] VA, a statewide approach to preventing heart attacks and strokes. Health districts, organizations, hospitals, providers, pharmacists, and Virginians were challenged to screen blood pressures in one million people during the month of May to highlight the importance of controlling hypertension—to prevent heart attacks and strokes—in Virginia.
- The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials is convening a series of webinars that share best practices and technical assistance from state health officials, chronic disease directors, and heart and stroke disease prevention leaders in their states.

- The National Consumers League incorporated Million Hearts goals into the activities of Script Your Future, a national campaign to raise awareness of medication adherence that features coordinated national communications and targeted outreach in six cities.
- The Virginia Health Quality Center and Virginia Department of Health’s Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program (HDSP) led a session modeling how quality improvement organizations, HDSPs, and other Million Hearts partners can work together to enhance the state’s capacity to plan, implement, track, and sustain population-based interventions to address heart disease, stroke, and related risk factors.
- The Virginia Pharmacists Association and Virginia Commonwealth University School of Pharmacy collaborated with employers to support the Virginia Health Commissioner’s goal of screening one million Virginia residents for high blood pressure. Pharmacists and pharmacy students screened and counseled employees.
- The WomenHeart organization’s support networks used educational materials developed by the Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association to educate women and families using a network of peer mentors on hypertension.

These examples are just a few of the contributions and progress that Million Hearts supporters are making toward preventing heart attacks and strokes. To be successful, we must continue to educate health professionals and the public about improving their ABCS and the benefits for individuals and society of living a healthier lifestyle.

I urge all public health professionals to learn more about the Million Hearts initiative and work within their own organizations and communities to sustain these efforts to prevent heart disease and stroke. Together, we can prevent more than one million heart attacks and strokes.



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RESOURCES

Million Hearts (<http://millionhearts.hhs.gov/index.html>)

Heart 360® (<https://www.heart360.org/Default.aspx>)

My Life Check™ (<http://mylifecheck.heart.org>)

Heart Attack Risk Calculator (http://50.56.33.51/hart01/main_en_US.html)

Script Your Future (<http://scriptyourfuture.org>)

National Prevention Strategy (<http://www.healthcare.gov/prevention/nphpphc/strategy/index.html>)

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