

[Sidebar 3]

The Prevention Paradigm

Those of us advocating a Prevention Paradigm as an essential component of health policy enhancement have an obligation to define precisely what it is we are envisioning. *Simply put, a prevention oriented health policy addresses the determinants of health.*

Specifically, a prevention and health promotion policy provides adequate resources to foster universal health literacy about proper nutrition, the necessity of physical activity, the pervasive toxicity of tobacco, personal safety and injury control, and handling stress. Not addressed, these determinants account for 80% of chronic illnesses and premature deaths in our nation.

A preventive policy continually monitors the quality of our social and built environments, especially the pernicious effects of poverty and inadequate education. These are the prime sources of disparities in health among our populations. The determinants of health, of course, include the availability of primary care *as well as* access to affordable intensive medical services *when needed*.

If this definition of Prevention seems daunting, consider this: Of the over 2.3 trillion dollars spent on health care services in 2007, only 3–5% was allotted to what can be defined as health promotion and disease prevention. With total medical care costs increasing as they are—without attention, the prevention portion will decrease just when we need it the most. The mission of NECON is to change that equation.

To achieve significant changes in personal behaviors, critical improvements in our social and built environments, and enhancement in our primary and intensive medical services, NECON has chosen as its path what our mentor, former Surgeon General Julius Richmond described as “creating political will.” To that end NECON has forged an entity for cross-border collaboration with the call to “think regionally and act locally,” while building a regional movement for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.