Top Ten Things To Know
Population Approaches to Improve Diet, Physical Activity, and Smoking Habits

1. Given that less than 1% of Americans meet the AHA criteria for ideal diet, and sedentary lifestyles and tobacco use are the leading causes for preventable diseases, lifestyle and behavior changes for these factors are critical to improving the population's health.

2. This statement identifies six domains for each of the three lifestyle factors (smoking, diet, and physical activity) and provides 18 combinations categorized as: (1) media and education campaigns; (2) labeling and consumer information; (3) taxation, subsidies, and other economic incentives; (4) school and workplace approaches; (5) local environmental changes; and (6) direct restrictions and mandates.

3. The authors identify, review, organize, grade, and summarize the literature in the area of population approaches to improve the three lifestyle factors and provide 500 useful references along with 8 primary tables and more than a dozen supplementary tables.

4. The assessment includes guidance on which approaches work and should be implemented; which approaches are promising and deserving of further investigation, and what critical research gaps need attention.

5. Included is information on several observational cross-sectional studies and limited longitudinal studies that report that food labels have virtually no effect on consumers' dietary choices; meanwhile limited studies have evaluated the impact of focused front-of-pack labels on consumer behavior, which may influence the food industry to make products healthier.

6. Changes in prices seem to alter behavior, like choosing healthier foods when they are cheaper, walking more when gas prices are higher, and not smoking if packs of cigarettes are too expensive. On the other hand, changes in agricultural subsidies to more nutrient-dense foods have a limited effect on consumption.

7. Also in the statement is evidence that supports improvement on healthier behavior through the use of school-based interventions focusing on gardens, fresh fruits, and vegetables, environmental changes in cafeterias and vending machines, and multi-component interventions focused on both diet and physical activity.

8. Conclusions recommend that health systems become more aligned to promote healthier behaviors by improving use of medical training, electronic medical records, structuring of individual and group visits, and reimbursement guidelines.

9. Systematic collation, monitoring, and evaluation of behavior change policies should be maintained at the local, state, and federal levels to understand more clearly successful mechanisms in changing behavior.

10. Greater access to recreation and exercise spaces is positively linked with greater physical activity, but evidence of whether sidewalks increase such activity is mixed.