

The Futures Initiative

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According to polls, CDC's public rating is high, making this an opportune time to reevaluate the mission and consider the agency's future strategies with respect to prevention, emerging public health threats, globalization, public health infrastructure, changing demographics, rising healthcare costs, and information technology. An 'outside-in' approach has been taken to solicit information and constructive criticism both from past partners and new sectors (e.g., business, academia, education, transportation, state and local health departments, and the broader health-care-delivery system). CDC is currently in the process of developing health goals and objectives by a life-stage approach, preparing for all types of intentional and unintentional health threats, while better defining its global role and building surveillance and laboratory capacity. The agency must also build public health research capacity, both intramurally and by extramural peer review.

The Futures Initiative includes four areas of emphasis: a) customers, partners, and channels; b) public health research; c) global health; and d) health systems. Focus groups were held with customers (i.e., the public) and partners. Customer feedback has indicated strong CDC brand recognition. The agency is perceived as being credible and trustworthy, a "communicable disease agency" known for its infectious capacity. The agency is seen as a good source of information for health-care providers and the public. However, the public is less aware of CDC's focus on occupational, environmental, and global health, or prevention of chronic disease/injury. Most customer groups agreed that CDC provides reliable information, but were unsure how to obtain it. Perceived pharmaceutical company partnerships could be potentially damaging to CDC's credibility. Partner feedback focused on a) chronic disease burden, b) the continuance of preparing for emerging health threats, c) overcoming silos to improve internal and external customer relations, and d) improving the public health infrastructure. Less frequently mentioned priorities included a) improving research capacity, b) bridging gaps between medicine and public health, and c) setting public health priorities and communicating them to policymakers, partners and the public. Balancing the prevention role with emergency and high profile needs and long-term public health needs is an ongoing challenge for CDC, as well as maintaining high expertise levels while limiting silos.

Preliminary ideas resulting from the Health Systems Work Group included a) marketing and integration of prevention within the health system; targeting prevention to address social, behavioral and environmental health determinants, and b) making public health an effective partner in prevention; enhancing the workforce, improving information systems, and assuring organizational capacity. The Public Health Research Work Group has established an extramural peer-review research agenda-setting process and program due for release this month. The Global Health Work Group is focusing on a) developing sustainable public health capacity in key countries; b) preventing and controlling high priority causes of death, injury, and disability; c) building partnerships and networks to support national and international prevention; and d) enhancing CDC's capacity to respond to global health.

In addition to FY'04 global health funding availability, CDC's future global health directives depend on its ability to strengthen detection, build disease capacity, and increase international response capabilities. Supportive strategic initiatives include a) revitalizing and redefining the public health system, b) developing marketing and communication as an effective intervention arm, c) strengthening public health (health protection) research, d) increasing global health impact, e) re-inventing the way CDC does business; procurements and grants, hiring recruitment and retention practices, and information technology (IT), and f) redesigning CDC's organizational structure and accountabilities to support strategic direction. Dr. Gerberding will announce next week the establishment of a Design Team, representing each CIO, to address and make recommendations on CDC's organizational structure. The establishment of life-stage priorities and critical health issues will also be a major focus.

The Futures Initiative is an ongoing process focused on enhancing the Agency to more significantly impact and sustain public health both in the United States and globally. CDC aims to become more externally focused, consider new avenues of collaboration for research and programs, and continue to build capacities with traditional partners.