



REGINA M. BENJAMIN MD, MBA
SURGEON GENERAL

Dear Fellow USPHS Commissioned Corps Officers, Staff, and Friends:

It has been an honor to serve as the 18th Surgeon General of the United States. I have informed the President and HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius of my decision to leave my position as Surgeon General effective July 16, 2013. I thank President Obama for the honor he bestowed on me, four years ago this month, when he announced my nomination.

That day in the Rose Garden, I spoke of wanting to prevent other Americans from suffering the loss of loved ones, as I had, due to preventable illnesses such as smoking-related lung cancer, strokes, and HIV. My goal was to create a grassroots movement, to change our health care system from one focused on sickness and disease to a system focused on wellness and prevention. With your help, that movement has begun.

Thank you for your support of my vision to improve the health of our nation by focusing on prevention. Together, we have partnered with everyone from nonprofits to companies big and small, to local, state and tribal governments, as well as thousands of individuals to help Americans understand that health occurs everywhere, not just in the doctor's office or the hospital.

Your hard work and extraordinary service has helped us achieve several historic accomplishments during these challenging times.

As Chair of the National Prevention, Health Promotion, and Public Health Council, which was established by the Affordable Care Act, I led the release of the landmark National Prevention Strategy (NPS). The NPS serves as a roadmap to work with partners at local, national, and international levels to help bridge the gaps in health disparities and ultimately increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life. The strategy was developed by the National Prevention Council, which is composed of 17 cabinet-level heads of federal agencies, including the Departments of Transportation, Education, Agriculture, Labor, Defense, HUD, and the EPA, with input from hundreds of stakeholders.

The NPS illuminates and puts into action what we in Public Health have been saying for more than a hundred years: Prevention is the foundation of public health and prevention is the foundation of an effective health care system.

The National Prevention Council Annual Report, to be released later this month, shows positive trends in some leading health indicators.

Among the highlights are decreases in:

- youth ages 3 to 11 exposed to secondhand smoke;
- the number of adolescents who are current smokers;
- the rate of coronary heart disease deaths;
- stroke deaths; and
- overall cancer deaths.

I am also particularly proud of several key reports and campaigns that reinforce the importance of prevention, including:

- *The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation*, which focused on prevention of obesity at all ages, healthy eating, physical activity, and managing stress. The First Lady's leadership with her *Let's Move Initiative* has helped take this issue to heights of awareness and success that a Surgeon General alone could not have done.
- *Surgeon General's Report on How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease – the Heart Stopper Report* concluded that exposure to tobacco smoke – even occasional smoking or secondhand smoke – causes immediate damage to your body that can lead to serious illness or death.
- *Surgeon General's Report on Preventing Tobacco Use among Youth and Young Adults* focused on health effects on tobacco use and interventions.
- *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding* identified ways that families, communities, employers and health care professionals can increase support for breastfeeding and improve breastfeeding rates.
- *National Suicide Prevention Strategy*, an ambitious national strategy to reduce the number of deaths by suicide.

Because health occurs where we live, learn, work, play, and pray, I felt it was important to go where the people are and to lead by example. I am very proud of our efforts to engage communities in creative ways, including:

- *Surgeon General Every Body Walks Initiative*, a national walking and walkable communities initiative bringing together more than 400 partner organizations to encourage everyone to take steps toward better health.

- *Surgeon General Journey of Joy*, an initiative based on the simple fact that any lifestyle change needs to be fun in order to sustain over time.
- *My Family Health Portrait*, an Internet-based tool encouraging people to collect their family health history during the holidays when families gather together.
- *Annual Exercise Friendly Hair Competition* engages with hair stylists to become ambassadors for health by removing a major barrier to routine exercising.

The nation must take a more holistic and integrative approach to community health as called for in the Affordable Care Act. No one understands this concept better than you. Our nation has faced many disasters. Every time, you have swiftly met the challenge with expertise, professionalism, compassion, and honor. From the Gulf Oil Spill to Hurricane Sandy; from the Boston bombings to the tornados of Oklahoma, the US Public Health Service was there. Too few Americans know that you are a distinct branch of the uniformed services (military). Just as the Air Force protects our skies, and the Navy protects our shores, you protect the public's health.

I was called to serve, and I have truly enjoyed serving as America's Doctor, promoting prevention in everything we do. I will leave the Office of Surgeon General confident that we have paved the path for a healthier nation with a much stronger focus on wellness and prevention.

My deputy, RADM Boris D. Lushniak, M.D., M.P.H., will serve as Acting Surgeon General while a search is underway for the next Surgeon General.

My personal plans include taking a short break and enjoying the summer as I explore new challenges and opportunities to make a difference. I will spend some time volunteering at my clinic in Alabama, allowing me to get back in touch with my patients, whom many of you know I have missed greatly.

My sincere thanks to each of you for welcoming me into the PHS family. I am so proud to have served as your Surgeon General.

God bless you all and God bless America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Regina Benjamin MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Regina M. Benjamin, MD, MBA
Vice Admiral USPHS
Surgeon General
#SurgeonGeneralReginaBenjamin