The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), first convened by the U.S. Public Health Service in 1984, and since 1998 sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), is the leading independent panel of private-sector experts in prevention and primary care. The USPSTF conducts rigorous, impartial assessments of the scientific evidence for the effectiveness of a broad range of clinical preventive services, including screening, counseling, and preventive medications. Its recommendations are considered the "gold standard" for clinical preventive services.

The mission of the USPSTF is to evaluate the benefits of individual services based on age, gender, and risk factors for disease; make recommendations about which preventive services should be incorporated routinely into primary medical care and for which populations; and identify a research agenda for clinical preventive care.

Background and Mission

Public Law Section 915 mandates that AHRQ convene the USPSTF to conduct scientific evidence reviews of a broad array of clinical preventive services, develop recommendations for the health care community, and provide ongoing administrative, research, technical, and dissemination support.


Process

The Task Force makes its recommendations on the basis of explicit criteria. Recommendations issued by the USPSTF are intended for use in the primary care setting. The USPSTF recommendation statements present health care providers with information about the evidence behind each recommendation, allowing clinicians to make informed decisions about implementation.

The USPSTF is supported by an Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC). Under contract to AHRQ, the EPC conducts systematic reviews of the evidence on specific topics in clinical prevention that serve as the scientific basis for USPSTF recommendations.

The USPSTF reviews the evidence, estimates the magnitude of benefits and harms for each preventive service, reaches consensus about the net benefit for each preventive service, and issues a recommendation.

The Task Force grades the strength of the evidence from "A" (strongly recommends), "B" (recommends), "C" (no recommendation for or against), "D" (recommends against), or "I" (insufficient evidence to recommend for or against).

Members of the USPSTF

The USPSTF comprises primary care clinicians (e.g., internists, pediatricians, family physicians, gynecologists/obstetricians, and nurses). Individual members' interests include: decision modeling and evaluation; effectiveness in clinical preventive medicine; clinical epidemiology; the prevention of high-risk behaviors in adolescents; geriatrics; and the prevention of disability in the elderly.

Current members of the Task Force are listed below. They have recognized expertise in prevention, evidence-based medicine, and primary care.

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Role of AHRQ Staff

It is AHRQ's mission to improve the safety, quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care for all Americans. The USPSTF is a prime example of the Agency's efforts to translate research on preventive medicine into practice.

In keeping with its mission and the importance of prevention, AHRQ has augmented its support staff for the USPSTF and for its prevention programs in general. The AHRQ Center for Primary Care, Prevention, and Clinical Partnerships oversees operation of the USPSTF, and provides administrative, programmatic, and technical support for the USPSTF program.

Role of Partners

Partners to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force are drawn from the fields of primary care, public health, health promotion, policy, and quality improvement. Liaisons from these groups and from Federal health agencies contribute their expertise in the peer review of draft USPSTF documents and help disseminate the work of the USPSTF to their members.

Primary care partners include:

- American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)
- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP)
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
- American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)
- American College of Physicians (ACP)
- American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM)
- American Osteopathic Association (AOA)
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP)

Policy, population, and quality improvement partners include:

- America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP)
- AARP
- National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA)

Federal partners include:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
- Indian Health Service (IHS)
- National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- Veteran's Health Administration (VHA)
- Department of Defense/Military Health System (DoD/MHS)
- Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP)
- Office of the Surgeon General
Impact of the USPSTF

USPSTF recommendations have formed the basis of the clinical standards for many professional societies, health organizations, and medical quality review groups. Previous editions of the Guide to Clinical Preventive Services have been used widely in undergraduate and post-graduate medical and nursing education as a key reference for teaching preventive care.

The work of the USPSTF has helped establish the importance of including prevention in primary health care, ensuring insurance coverage for effective preventive services, and holding providers and health care systems accountable for delivering effective care.

USPSTF recommendations highlight the opportunities for improving delivery of effective services and have helped others in narrowing gaps in the provision of preventive care in different populations.

For More Information

Go to http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstffix.htm:

- To access recommendations made by the USPSTF and the articles that summarize the evidence on which the recommendations are based.
- To find out how to receive CD-ROM and print publications of USPSTF recommendations.
- And, to sign up for AHRQ's Prevention Program LISTSERV®.

To download the Electronic Preventive Services Selector (ePSS), a searchable PDA and online tool of USPSTF recommendations, go to: http://pda.ahrq.gov.

For more information, contact:

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The recommendations of the USPSTF are made for asymptomatic populations; the recommendations made by the Task Force are not disease—or individual—specific. If you have concerns about your health, contact your medical care provider.

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