

The University of New Mexico

**Division of Public Administration
Albuquerque, NM 87131-1216**

Bill Clinton, President
The White House
Washington, DC

February 2, 1993

Dear President Clinton:

If you desire to improve the health status of Americans and decrease health care costs, improve public health services delivered through state and local health agencies. Public health is the art and science of preventing disease and injury, prolonging life, and promoting health and efficiency through organized community effort.

**Public health is not health care!
Health care is not public health!**

Health care refers to those treatment and diagnostic services designed to treat or rehabilitate a patient under care, and is accomplished on a one-on-one basis by health care providers.

The over emphasis on health care coupled with inadequate emphasis on public health (prevention, promotion, and environmental health) is one of the primary reason we have the health care cost and access problem.

We must understand the total health services continuum (see attached), including environmental health and protection, disease and injury prevention, health promotion, as well as health care if effective measures are to be taken to deal with the issues of cost and access and improving the health status of Americans.

Obviously, there are changes needed in the health care system, but the improvements required in the public health services delivered through state and local health departments are much more compelling.

Public health has not been as glamorous as the health care system, e.g., doctors and hospitals, organ transplants, emergency surgery, etc.

But the health care system will continue to be a runaway monster without improving public health services (prevention, promotion and environmental health) as a prerequisite. You cannot repair the plumbing without turning off the water supply first!

Our taxpayers spend \$7,500,000 per hour due to the toxic and ultimately fatal effects of tobacco, while almost 50 lives are taken by tobacco every hour. Similar alarming figures could be quoted for alcohol, violent deaths, accidents, heart disease, cancer, hypertension, poor nutrition, etc. None of these is ameliorated by the health care system, but many could be prevented by improved public health services

Public health services are woefully under funded throughout the nation. Ninety-three and six-tenths percent of all health services dollars are for health care, 3.5% for research, and only 2.9% are for public health. The nation's health demands greater attention through public health services. (Parenthetically, 6% for public health would provide commitment to the adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.)

Improved public health services such as identified by the U.S. Public Health Service in Healthy People 2000. Health Objectives for the Nation, are essential not only to enhance the health status of Americans, but to deal with the health care cost crisis. Opportunities relating to prevention of the leading causes of death such as heart disease, cancer, accidents, hypertension, chronic obstructive heart disease, influenza/pneumonia, diabetes, cirrhosis of the liver, suicides, homicides, congenital anomalies and AIDS await the effectively funded attention of public health.

We must have a commitment to preventing damage to the human machine in balance with efforts to repair the human machine after it is worn or damaged. Once the health care system is needed, the battle for wellness and longevity has frequently been lost. The cost-effective, humane, compassionate and effective approach is to do an effective job of prevention.

The recent report of the Institute of Medicine The Future of Public Health, stated that "this nation has lost sight of its public health goals and has allowed the system of public health activities to fail into disarray."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry J. Gordon". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Larry J. Gordon Visiting Professor