



## Health Policy Lesson: Manage the Inevitable

Eat healthy. Exercise. Wash your hands.

We have learned a lot of lessons about health and healthcare, and are learning new lessons now from the current crisis. But many of these lessons still feed into the deeply entrenched American assumption that health outcomes are all about the decisions we make as individuals. The current moment is a time when people are confronting how the decisions we make collectively as a society have a profound impact on the health of our population.

One lesson that we NEED our elected leaders and the broader public to learn from this crisis is that:

*All of us inevitably encounter health challenges – regardless of how we live our lives – so communities, states, and the country ought to have systems and policies that help make those challenges as manageable as possible.*

This seems obvious now as we collectively struggle to defeat COVID-19, and all Americans become painfully aware of the failures of leadership, planning and response that are exacerbating both the health and the economic crisis. However, this simple, commonsense idea has certainly not guided public thinking about health policy up to this point, and it has not typically guided policymakers' actions either.

**Topos research (prior to COVID-19 but even more relevant now) demonstrates that pointing out this simple lesson – that all of us inevitably encounter health challenges, and public policies should help make those challenges manageable – builds broad public understanding and support for policy action on topics from opioids to Medicare to paid leave.**

All of us are hit by health challenges at various times. So it makes all the sense in the world for us to make these inevitable situations more manageable for everyone. Instead, we allow health to be yet another aspect of our lives where race and class create disparities: if our jobs don't provide health coverage or flexibility, if there is limited access to clinics or medicines in our neighborhoods, if we can't work from home and can't afford to go without a day's pay, etc.

Too often, health is treated as an area where you're on your own. The current crisis is a lesson to all of us – and especially to public administrators, elected officials, and advocates – that we're all in it together. We must think, plan, invest and build ahead of time, so that we all fare better when the unexpected inevitably happens, either in the form of a global crisis or the kinds of health situations people face daily.

Communicators will find that framing health policy as being about **making inevitable health challenges manageable** will make the conversation clearer and more compelling for all of us.

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