

Americans Die Younger, Live Sicker Their Entire Lives

Jan. 10—What happens when a nation violates the fundamental principle that essential services such as medical care and education must be a basic right for all citizens, is graphically demonstrated by a new report, *U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health*. Presented to the public on Jan. 9, it documents that Americans are far less healthy their entire lives and die younger than the citizens of 16 other industrialized nations.

This crisis has been developing since the 1980s, as deregulation and deindustrialization of the economy set in, and the HMO system, in particular, really took off; it will get worse with the cost-cutting measures of Obama-care. Most importantly, it reflects the *devaluation* of human life, and an abdication of government responsibility to promote the general welfare.

The U.S. National Institutes of Health commissioned the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine to prepare this report. Editors Steven H. Woolf and Laudan Aron wrote that the “United States is among the wealthiest nations in the world, but it is far from the healthiest. . . . Americans live shorter lives and experience more injuries and illnesses than people in other high-income countries. The U.S. health disadvantage cannot be attributed solely to the adverse health status of racial or ethnic minorities or poor people: even highly advantaged Americans are in worse health than their counterparts in other, ‘peer’ countries.”

Shocking Figures

The report compares U.S. health statistics to those of 16 nations, including Great Britain, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Australia, Canada, and Japan. Its findings are consistent with those arrived at by the OECD, World Health Organization, CIA, and other national and international institutions in recent years. The United States, Turkey, and Mexico are the only OECD nations without universal health insurance, thus making health care a privilege rather than a universal right.

Most shocking is that, despite spending by far the most per capita, and as a percent of GDP, on health care in the world, the U.S. has an infant mortality rate higher than any nation in western Europe, higher than Japan or South Korea, as well as Israel, Slovenia, and Cuba. Life expectancy at birth is significantly lower: U.S. male life expectancy was the lowest of all 17 nations studied, and female life expectancy second to the lowest (see **Table**).

This crisis is the result of a long-term problem, which has steadily worsened over the past 30 years. The new report looked in detail at data from the late 1990s to 2008. “Over this time period, we uncovered a strikingly consistent and pervasive pattern of higher mortality and inferior health in the United States, beginning at birth,” it said.

Younger Dying at Faster Rate

The report emphasizes that it is younger Americans who are dying. Americans have the *lowest probability overall* of surviving to the age of 50. “We expected to see some bad news and some good news,” Dr. Woolf said. “But the U.S. ranked near and at the bottom in almost every health indicator. That stunned us.”

Deaths before age 50 account for about 66% of the difference in life expectancy between U.S. males, and about 33% of U.S. females, and that of their counterparts in the other countries, the *New York Times* reported. Only Americans age 75 and older have a better perspective.

“This health disadvantage exists across all ages and demographics,” the authors report. Dr. Woolf told PBS that “the U.S. is doing worse than these other countries both in terms of life expectancy and health throughout their entire lives. This is a pervasive problem from birth to old age; it affects everyone and has been a long-standing problem.”

The U.S. also far exceeds all the other countries in homicides, injuries, and drug-related deaths. However, Woolf said, while the researchers had expected that homicide would be an important factor in explaining the

TABLE: Seventeen High-Income Countries Ranked by Life Expectancy at Birth, 2007

Males			Females		
Rank	Country	Average Length of Life	Rank	Country	Average Length of Life
1	Switzerland	79.33	1	Japan	85.98
2	Australia	79.27	2	France	84.43
3	Japan	79.20	3	Switzerland	84.09
4	Sweden	78.92	3	Italy	84.09
5	Italy	78.82	5	Spain	84.03
6	Canada	78.35	6	Australia	83.78
7	Norway	78.25	7	Canada	82.95
8	Netherlands	78.01	7	Sweden	82.95
9	Spain	77.62	9	Austria	82.86
10	United Kingdom	77.43	9	Finland	82.86
11	France	77.41	11	Norway	82.68
12	Austria	77.33	12	Germany	82.44
13	Germany	77.11	13	Netherlands	82.31
14	Denmark	76.13	14	Portugal	82.19
15	Portugal	75.87	15	United Kingdom	81.68
16	Finland	75.86	16	United States	80.78
17	United States	75.64	17	Denmark	80.53

SOURCE: Data from the Human Mortality Database, the World Health Organization Mortality Database, and Statistics Canada, as reported in Ho, J. Y. and S.H. Preston (2011). International Comparisons of U.S. Mortality. Data analyses prepared for the National Academy of Sciences/Institute of Medicine Panel on Understanding Cross-National Health Differences Among High-Income Countries. Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania.

health disadvantage for younger American adults, especially young men, “the size of the *health* disadvantage was pretty stunning. The fact that our risk of death from homicide is seven times higher and from shootings 20 times higher is pretty dramatic, but I would add that probably just as important to us was the extent of the health disadvantage in young Americans that had *nothing* to do with violent injuries” (emphasis added).”

U.S. infant mortality is a national disaster, as every comparative report documents: 26-27,000 of the 4 million children born each year die before their first birthday.

Americans are dying from preventable or controllable diseases, the study found. The U.S. has the second-highest death rate from the most common form of heart disease, and the second-highest death rate from lung disease. Americans have by far the highest rate of obesity and diabetes. “The fact is, people are dying earlier than they should be and suffering at rates that are avoidable,” Dr. Woolf said. “They are suffering from diseases we know how to prevent and then dying unnecessarily.”

Behind the Veneer

The declining health of the U.S. population shouldn’t surprise those who have faced the actual decline in U.S. economy since the assassination of President John Kennedy. Not only has there been no actual physical economic growth since then, but the industrial plant and equipment, and the labor force have been driven into collapse, qualitatively and quantitatively, as the economy has been taken over more and more by cartels in every area of life, including health care. Investment in public health, a mainstay of communities, as well as at the national level, in the post-World War II era, has been cut to shreds, as private profiteers took over.

This reality is underscored by a study published in the August 2012 issue of *Health Affairs*, which notes that, after years of diminishing increases, life expectancies for the least educated Americans fell by a whopping four years, between 1990 and 2008. According to media reports on the study, “The steepest declines were for white women without a high school diploma,” who lost an average of five years of life (and are now below black women of similar education), while white men without diplomas lost an average of three years of life.

A study published Sept. 20, 2012 in the *American Journal of Public Health* provided another marker, finding that suicides have overtaken auto fatalities as the number one cause of “accidental” deaths. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, between 2000 and 2009, the number of people who committed suicide in the U.S. has jumped a startling 71%. Even this number may be understated, researchers say, since “suicides are notoriously under-reported,” and the study only accounted for suicides from “falls and poisonings,” but not drug overdoses.

The birth-rate picture reinforces the pattern, as an October 2012 report issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention concluded that the U.S. birth rate hit its lowest level ever in 2011, lower than that in the Great Depression. In fact, the general fertility rate (63.3 per 1,000 women age 15-44) was lower than any rate *ever* reported for the United States.

If Americans continue to tolerate Obama’s cuts to health care for the elderly and the poor, along with handing over health care to a corporatist system run by insurance cartels, this situation will only get worse.