

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Highlights High-Priority Evidence Gaps in 2020 Report to Congress

Task Force calls for more research on child and adolescent health

WASHINGTON, D.C. – December 3, 2020 – Today, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) released its 10th annual Report to Congress, highlighting research gaps from recent recommendations related to child and adolescent health, including mental and behavioral health, substance use, and obesity, with a focus on health inequities. Topics highlighted in the report include:

- Depression in Children and Adolescents: Screening
- Suicide Risk in Adolescents, Adults, and Older Adults: Screening
- Prevention and Cessation of Tobacco Use in Children and Adolescents: Primary Care Interventions
- Illicit Drug Use in Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults: Primary Care-Based Interventions
- Unhealthy Drug Use: Screening
- Obesity in Children and Adolescents: Screening

Children and adolescents have unique healthcare needs, and the spectrum of health conditions that affect children is different than that for adults. However, many of the health conditions that are most common in adults develop at a young age, potentially providing an early window for prevention of some chronic conditions.

“In this year’s Report to Congress, we call attention to high-priority research gaps from our recommendations related to child and adolescent health, including mental and behavioral health, substance use, and obesity,” says Task Force chair Alex H. Krist, M.D., M.P.H. “We hope this call for research will fill those gaps and lead to preventive care recommendations that have a lasting impact through adulthood.”

The Task Force has a long-standing commitment to making recommendations that promote health equity. By proactively searching for data on promoting health and preventing disease in a variety of populations, calling for new research to fill existing gaps, and communicating clearly about how to support people’s varying health needs, the Task Force hopes to improve equity in preventable diseases.

“Promoting health equity is a top priority for the Task Force,” says Task Force vice chair Karina W. Davidson, Ph.D., M.A.Sc. “Many health disparities start in early childhood, so research on these issues will help clinicians meaningfully assist patients and their families in preventing them and help in reducing health inequities.”

The report also provides an update on the Task Force’s activities over the past year, during which it continued to work on a full portfolio of topics that includes 85 preventive service recommendation statements. From October 1, 2019, to September 30, 2020, the public had the opportunity to comment on 10 draft research plans, 12 draft recommendation statements, and 13 draft evidence reviews. The Task Force also published eight final recommendation statements with 14 recommendation grades in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and on the Task Force website.

The “10th Annual Report to Congress on High-Priority Evidence Gaps for Clinical Preventive Services” can be found on the Task Force website at <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/about-uspstf/reports-congress>.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Krist is a professor of family medicine and population health at Virginia Commonwealth University and an active clinician and teacher at the Fairfax Family Practice Residency. He is director of the Virginia Ambulatory Care Outcomes Research Network and director of community-engaged research at the VCU Wright Center.

Dr. Davidson is senior vice president of research, dean of academic affairs, and head of a new center focused on personalized trials at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research at Northwell Health. She is also a professor of behavioral medicine at the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra University/Northwell Health.

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