



February 17, 2025

Testimony of Laura Hale  
American Heart Association  
**Favorable HB 974 Health Insurance Preventive Services Enforcement Authority**

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Honorable Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its strong support for HB 974. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Senior Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), including heart diseases and stroke, is the leading cause of death and disability in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> It is also the costliest disease in the U.S., costing America \$555 billion in 2016, and projected to cost \$1.1 trillion by 2035<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, the disease process can start early in life and is influenced over time by lifestyle behaviors, the environments where people live, work and play, and modifiable risk factors, including smoking, overweight and obesity, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, elevated blood cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes. Several studies support the link between minimizing these risk factors and reducing chronic disease. Highlights of that research include:

- Reductions in major risk factors accounted for approximately half the decrease in deaths from coronary heart disease between 1980 and 2000<sup>3</sup>.
- Among men and women under 70 years old, 61% of cardiovascular deaths may have been avoided through a healthy diet, moderate alcohol intake, daily exercise, and not smoking<sup>4</sup>.
- A review by USPSTF showed that counseling to improve diet or increase physical activity changed health behaviors and was associated with small improvements in weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels<sup>5</sup>.
- Comprehensive coverage of tobacco cessation services in the Massachusetts Medicaid program led to a 46% reduction in hospitalizations for heart attacks and a 49% decrease in hospitalizations for other acute heart disease diagnoses among users of the benefit. Additionally, every \$1 in program costs was associated with \$3.12 in medical savings for cardiovascular conditions alone, for a \$2.12 return on investment to the Medicaid program for every dollar spent<sup>6</sup>.
- As chronic disease risk factors are becoming more common in young adults, there is inadequate assessment, screening and management for cardiovascular disease among this population<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Virani SS, et al. Heart disease and stroke statistics—2020 update: a report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2020;141:e139–e596 Available at: <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/CIR.0000000000000757>

<sup>2</sup> American Heart Association. Cardiovascular Disease: A Costly Burden for America- Projections through 2035. 2017. Available at: [http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm\\_491543.pdf](http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm_491543.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ford ES, Ajani UA, Croft JB, Critchley JA, Labarthe DR, Kottke TE, Giles WH, Capewell S. Explaining the decrease in U.S. deaths from coronary disease, 1980-2000. *N Engl J Med*. 2007; 356:2388–2398. doi: 10.1056/NEJMs053935

<sup>4</sup> Gorelick PB. Primary prevention of stroke: Impact of healthy lifestyle. *Circulation*. 2008; 118:904-906.

<sup>5</sup> Linn JS. et al., Behavioral Counseling to Promote Physical Activity and a Healthful Diet to Prevent Cardiovascular Disease in Adults. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 2010;153(11):736-750.

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Case Study: The Effect of Expanding Cessation Coverage— The Massachusetts Medicaid Cessation Benefit. 2014. Available at: [https://www.cdc.gov/coordinatedchronic/pdf/tobacco\\_cessation\\_factsheet\\_508\\_compliant.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coordinatedchronic/pdf/tobacco_cessation_factsheet_508_compliant.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Kuklina, E.V. Prevalence of Coronary Heart Disease Risk Factors and Screening for High Cholesterol Levels Among Young Adults, United States, 1999–2006. *Annals of Family Medicine*. 2010. 8:327-333.

It is paramount that these protections be enshrined in state law to continue to protect Marylander's health and the coverage of preventative services. The American Heart Association urges a favorable report on HB 974 to support the health of all Marylanders.