

CONTROVERSIES

in Public Health and Health Policy

Jan K. Carney, MD, MPH

Associate Dean for Public Health
Professor of Medicine
University of Vermont College of Medicine
Burlington, VT



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DEDICATION

To Mom—Margaret Emma Cline Carney—the smartest and most fun person I know—for always being there.

To Dad—Hallidae Kirk Carney, DDS—for your hard work, integrity, and . . . a sense of humor.

To Geoff—husband, dad, doctor, and chef extraordinaire.

To Ali—resolver of the arts and sciences.

To Sydney—sunshine and laughter—creative and strong.

To Geoffrey—science and arts, music and heart, swift and sure-footed.

To Nan—my only sister, whom I love and admire.

To Ham and Elmore—woof, woof, wag, wag—best dogs ever.



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PREFACE

Controversies in Public Health and Health Policy is designed to teach public health and health policy to a variety of audiences through the study of controversies.

Why study controversies? Public health issues don't often emerge in an orderly way. Sometimes they creep up on us and only then become obvious, such as the story of obesity in the United States. Other times, they have a dramatic entrance, as in examples of some antibiotic-resistant infections, or outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. At other times, public health issues are enduring, such as ongoing challenges in improving mental health care or the social and economic factors determining our health.

Although this approach may seem like teaching and learning in reverse, many health issues only become obvious to the general public, public health and healthcare professionals, or policymakers as controversies. Controversies may be political or economic, or they may stem from scientific debate or not enough research, such as the history of firearm injuries.

Sometimes controversies help by raising awareness of immediate health crises. Other times they may hinder progress by sustaining inaction. In this book, controversies are *intentionally* presented in a way that highlights the breadth and resulting challenges, from myriad points of view.

Chapter topics reflect controversies in selected and significant public health and health policy topics. Many connect public health and health care, an important perspective given the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) and health system changes in the United States. Many health issues and their solutions are particularly challenging in different geographic areas, age groups, or among diverse social, economic, ethnic, and cultural groups, whether in the United States or on a global scale.

Some topics are recent and complex, such as health issues from climate change, E-cigarettes, or concussions in sports. Some health issues are so pervasive they risk becoming normalized in today's society—consider trends in adult obesity or binge drinking on college campuses.

Additionally, some public health issues require study over a longer time period to gain valuable insights. For example, it is difficult to examine current HIV prevention and treatment strategies apart from the history of HIV and AIDS. Similarly, the history of prescription drug abuse has deep roots in policy designed to alleviate pain and suffering. Today's controversies in health care for our nation's veterans are intertwined with their specific health needs and our changing healthcare system.

The textbook uses a structured format to examine each controversy and includes background, evidence base, discussion questions, and additional learning resources, challenging readers to consider public health and health policy by exploring these controversies and the issues behind them. For these public health and health policy issues, there is no simple answer. *Controversies* promotes self-learning, allowing readers to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions.

It is essential to remember why public health is so important, whether as a student, healthcare or public health professional, researcher, advocate, policymaker, or citizen. Public health uses a population approach and prevention strategies to protect and improve health, but public health's mission is improving the health and lives of *people*. Ultimately, if enough individuals use their combined public health knowledge, perhaps we *can* make progress on the far-too-challenging, complex, and controversial issues so important to the health of the public.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Jan K. Carney, MD, MPH is Associate Dean for Public Health and Professor of Medicine at the University of Vermont College of Medicine. She earned an AB from Middlebury College, an MD from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, and Master of Public Health (MPH) at the Harvard School of Public Health. Prior to her full-time faculty appointment at the University of Vermont College of Medicine, she served as Vermont's Commissioner of Health from 1989–2003, under three gubernatorial administrations, and participated in the design and implementation of a broad range of public health and health policy initiatives. At the University of Vermont College of Medicine, she is active in public health and health policy education; research, practice, and service; and also directs the University of Vermont's graduate programs in public health. She is also the author of *Public Health in Action: Practicing in the Real World*.

