Summary of Work Panel 2: Cost Containment Through Healthy Lifestyles

Often overlooked in the broader health system reform conversation is the role of individual wellness and how costs can be contained through adopting healthy lifestyles. Lt. Gov. Greg Bell facilitated a work panel discussion with the goal of identifying what steps need to be taken to make Utahns the healthiest people in the country, and what role healthy lifestyles can play in the state's overall effort to reduce health care costs.

Panelists discussed the need for sound health policies that can help foster healthy environments, which will lead to healthy choices and, ultimately, healthy people. The Utah Department of Health outlined four "winnable battles" where such policies can be implemented:

1. Physical activity, nutrition and obesity.
2. Tobacco prevention and cessation.
3. Prescription drug misuse and abuse.
4. Cancer screenings.

Panelists spoke about the financial ramifications and the health impacts of each issue on Utah residents and the Utah economy. Annual obesity-related health care costs are estimated to be $393 million in Utah, and by 2018 that figure is expected to increase to $2.3 billion. Smoking rates in Utah are the lowest in the nation, nevertheless, tobacco use represents a considerable health care expenditure. For every 1 percent Utah's smoking rate declines, $315 million in future health care costs are avoided.

Beyond the financial impacts, the human toll of these "winnable battles" is significant as well. Each year in Utah, more people die from prescription drug-related deaths than die in car accidents. And cancer, the 2nd leading cause of death in America, can be treated more effectively, and with much higher survival rates, if the disease is caught early with routine screenings.

Panelists will continue to meet over the next several months and work to develop solutions that governments, businesses, schools and individuals can implement in order to reduce the financial and emotional burden of these four "winnable battles."

Summarized by Tom Hudachko, Chief Public Information Officer, Utah Department of Health