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Dedication ................................................................. iii
Preface ................................................................. xiii
About the Author .................................................. xv

Chapter 1—Health vs. Health Care ......................... 1
  Learning Objectives ........................................... 1
  The Controversy ............................................... 1
  Background and Scope of the Public Health
    and Health Policy Issue ................................ 2
  Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice ............. 12
  Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion ....... 13
  Perspectives to Consider ................................... 14
  For Additional Study ....................................... 15
  References .................................................... 15

Chapter 2—Improving Health Literacy: Finding
High-Quality, Web-Based Information .................. 19
  Learning Objectives ......................................... 19
  The Controversy ............................................. 19
  Background and Scope of the Public Health
    and Health Policy Issue ................................ 20
  Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice ............. 25
  Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion ....... 29
  Perspectives to Consider ................................... 30
  For Additional Study ....................................... 31
  References .................................................... 32
Chapter 3—Obesity—Is Fat the New Normal?  ................. 35
  Learning Objectives ............................................. 35
  The Controversy .................................................. 35
  Background and Scope of the Public Health
  and Health Policy Issue ...................................... 36
  Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice ................. 44
  Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .......... 49
  Perspectives to Consider ...................................... 50
  For Additional Study .......................................... 51
  References ....................................................... 51

Chapter 4—Preventing Obesity—Raising the Price
of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages?  ......................... 57
  Learning Objectives ............................................. 57
  The Controversy .................................................. 57
  Background and Scope of the Public Health
  and Health Policy Issue ...................................... 58
  Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice ................. 63
  Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .......... 66
  Perspectives to Consider ...................................... 67
  For Additional Study .......................................... 68
  References ....................................................... 68

Chapter 5—Tobacco: E-Cigarettes—Help or Hazard?  ....... 73
  Learning Objectives ............................................. 73
  The Controversy .................................................. 73
  Background and Scope of the Public Health
  and Health Policy Issue ...................................... 74
  Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice ................. 79
  Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .......... 85
  Perspectives to Consider ...................................... 86
  For Additional Study .......................................... 87
  References ....................................................... 87
Chapter 6—Tobacco: Reducing Exposure
  to Secondhand Smoke......................... 91

  Learning Objectives ......................... 91
  The Controversy ............................. 92
  Background and Scope of the Public Health
    and Health Policy Issue .................... 92
  Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice .......... 94
  Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion ...... 101
  Perspectives to Consider ..................... 102
  For Additional Study ....................... 103
  References ................................ 103

Chapter 7—Alcohol: Binge Drinking on College
  Campuses................................. 107

  Learning Objectives ......................... 107
  The Controversy ............................. 107
  Background and Scope of the Public Health
    and Health Policy Issue .................... 108
  Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice .......... 113
  Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion ...... 119
  Perspectives to Consider ..................... 120
  For Additional Study ....................... 121
  References ................................ 121

Chapter 8—Health Reform: Controlling Costs ............ 123

  Learning Objectives ......................... 123
  The Controversy ............................. 123
  Background and Scope of the Public Health
    and Health Policy Issue .................... 125
  Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice .......... 132
  Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion ...... 137
  Perspectives to Consider ..................... 138
  For Additional Study ....................... 138
  References ................................ 139
Chapter 9—Health Reform: Improving Health

Learning Objectives ................................. 143
The Controversy ................................. 143
Background and Scope of the Public Health
    and Health Policy Issue ...................... 144
Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice ........ 145
Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .... 153
Perspectives to Consider ............................ 154
For Additional Study ............................. 155
References ..................................... 155

Chapter 10—Health Care—Improving Veterans’ Health

Learning Objectives ................................. 159
The Controversy ................................. 159
Background and Scope of the Public Health
    and Health Policy Issue ...................... 161
Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice ........ 167
Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .... 171
Perspectives to Consider ............................ 172
For Additional Study ............................. 173
References ..................................... 173

Chapter 11—Mental Health—A Continuing Crisis

Learning Objectives ................................. 179
The Controversy ................................. 179
Background and Scope of the Public Health
    and Health Policy Issue ...................... 181
Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice ........ 191
Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .... 194
Perspectives to Consider ............................ 195
For Additional Study ............................. 196
References ..................................... 196
Chapter 18—HIV and AIDS: The Fourth Decade .................. 319
   Learning Objectives ........................................ 319
   The Controversy ............................................. 319
   Background and Scope of the Public Health
   and Health Policy Issue ................................. 321
   Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice .......... 326
   Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .... 333
   Perspectives to Consider .................................. 334
   For Additional Study ........................................ 334
   References ..................................................... 335

Chapter 19—Radiation—Benefits and Risks of
   Medical Imaging. ................................. 339
   Learning Objectives ........................................ 339
   The Controversy ............................................. 339
   Background and Scope of the Public Health
   and Health Policy Issue ................................. 341
   Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice .......... 348
   Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .... 353
   Perspectives to Consider .................................. 354
   For Additional Study ........................................ 354
   References ..................................................... 354

Chapter 20—Physical Activity—Is Sitting Death? .......... 361
   Learning Objectives ........................................ 361
   The Controversy ............................................. 361
   Background and Scope of the Public Health
   and Health Policy Issue ................................. 363
   Evidence Base for Prevention and Practice .......... 369
   Discussion Questions: Template for Discussion .... 373
   Perspectives to Consider .................................. 373
   For Additional Study ........................................ 375
   References ..................................................... 375

Index ................................................................. 379
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.
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