

Don't ignore benefits of improving health

Nearly half our country's annual health-care costs can be attributed to preventable behaviors, namely tobacco use, inactivity and poor eating habits. It should come as no surprise that, as a general population, we are remarkably unhealthy.

While our country debates national health-care reform and tries to develop ways to reduce overall costs, it is irresponsible to ignore the benefits of wellness and health improvement.

Health-improvement efforts are the only way to focus on the supply and demand of health care. Simply put, because we are unhealthy, we treat bad habits by using the health-care system.

Decreasing our dependency on the health-care system by improving our general health will gradually reduce overall costs. But why is it so difficult to recognize health improvement as the real answer? Because it's not a quick fix.

While there are Americans who desperately need relief from medical bills, health-care reform must include tax incentives that encourage schools and workplaces to create a culture of wellness and invest in health-improvement programs.

If we don't create a plan for genuine wellness now, we'll continue spending money on a broken system.

— Kerry Juhl, vice president,
The Other Health Plan, Urbandale