



**WE'LL HAVE A POWERFUL STORY TO TELL:
BUILDING A CULTURE OF HEALTH**

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Good morning and thank you for that wonderful introduction!

I'm glad to see so many of you up and eager to start giving some fresh air to fresh thoughts about health. As you know, health is the backbone of personal fulfillment. It's the bedrock of prosperity. And that is why I want to talk to you about building a Culture of Health in America.

By that I mean shifting the values—and the actions—of this country so that health becomes a part of everything we do: so much so that we don't even think about it.

Why?

Because with health, grandparents can stay in their homes longer, contribute to their communities longer, and play with their grandkids longer. With health, our military can perform at its highest level. Our businesses can rely on the vitality of workers to stay competitive. And with health, each one of us can make the most of life's opportunities.

That's why we at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, have made building a Culture of Health our North Star—the central aim of everything we do. And I hope it will become your North Star, too.

The theme of this year's Festival is *Imagining 2024*. And when it comes to building a Culture of Health, I believe a decade from now we will have a powerful story to tell.

It will be the story of how we as a nation came to see that health means so much more than simply not being sick.

How we came to recognize that it is a vital aspect of how and where we work. How and where we live. How we raise, and educate, our children. And how we make decisions for our families.

It will be about how we rejected as inevitable that our kids—a third of whom are overweight or obese today—have a real chance of becoming the first generation of Americans to live sicker and die younger than their parents. And it will be a story about how we overcame the dismal fact that in 2014, a shocking 75 percent of America's young adults were too fat, too poorly educated, or too tangled up in criminal nonsense to serve in the military.

It will be a powerful story of how we resolved to no longer accept that our nation spends more than 2.7 trillion dollars on health care, and yet continues to lose 227 billion dollars in productivity each year because of poor health.

In fact, I believe if we put our heads together over the next two days, we can begin to make sure



that in 2024 our children will live in a much healthier world. We just have to give them the opportunity.

Building a true Culture of Health is an idea that requires us to stretch our current understanding of health in ways we have never done before. It's a view that respects the American mosaic of diversity. Our many different backgrounds. Our family and ethnic traditions. And the right for health to mean different things to different people. And at the same time, it's a view that provides all of us the opportunity to pursue health equally, no matter what our background, or heritage happens to be.

Imagine living in a society where promoting health is as important as treating illness. Imagine everyone being able to get high-quality health care—where, when, and how they need it.

Imagine doctors openly sharing their medical notes with patients... Honestly discussing the price and value of treatments in a way that helps patients get well and saves money.

Picture cities, towns, and neighborhoods making sure the health of all of our children is a matter of fact and not a matter of chance. And knowing that our employers, our mayors, our educators, and our families are working together to give everyone the tools, and the opportunities, to make responsible choices.

It's a bold idea... It's the idea of creating a society that not only believes, but insists, that every person, no matter who they are, has the chance to lead a healthy life. The thing is, I believe this sort of America is possible. In fact, I believe it's ours for the making. And in the year 2024, I believe we will be well on our way to achieving it.

Now, at this point some of you may be thinking that I am a little naïve. Or maybe that the mountain altitude has scrambled my brain. The bubble over your head says “Nice fairy tale, but what about the harsh reality?”

Currently, our nation's health and our health care system aren't exactly badges of pride.

- Too many Americans are coping with avoidable chronic diseases. And every day there are tens of thousands of hospitalizations that don't have to happen.
- Heart disease, cancer, and stroke still account for more than 50 percent of all deaths in America each year.
- And where you live affects your health so much that your ZIP code at birth may be as important as your genetic code in predicting how well, and how long, you live.

Let me give you a couple of examples: Look at this slide of the Washington, D.C. Metro. See the red line? Babies born and raised out there can expect to live to be 84 years old. But if you happen to be born and raised just a few subway stops away, in downtown D.C., your life is probably going to be shorter. Up to seven years shorter.

And in New Orleans it's even worse. A person living up there in Lakeview can expect to live 25 years longer than someone over there, in Iberville, which is just about six miles away.



Needless to say, these are not the hallmarks of a Culture of Health.

And when it comes to our youngest children:

- Research tells us that critical learning takes place from the moment of birth to the age of three. But in most states, our kids can't go to public school until they are five.
- And, far too many of our kids continue to be exposed to the everyday trauma of extreme poverty, food insecurity, family violence, or substance abuse—the sort of toxic stress that can severely compromise their mental and physical development.

Additionally, we are all painfully aware that under our current health care system the quality, the cost, and the patient experience that many Americans receive is disparate, disorganized, and dismissive.

Yes, these are the harsh realities and we will *not* achieve a Culture of Health if we continue down this path. But my hope is that the ideas we discuss and develop here in Aspen will start us down a new road. One that allows us to join forces and begin addressing all the challenges I just mentioned, and many more.

But that can only happen if we undergo a fundamental change in our perspective of what constitutes health. We have to experience a “light bulb” moment. A moment that shines a beam of recognition on how these very serious, very complicated and very different issues are, in fact, intrinsically connected.

Let me tell you when that light bulb moment happened to me: I trained as a physician at Harvard and rotated through a hospital in West Roxbury, a few miles away. That is where I met a patient that I will forever remember as the “Patient Ruth.” She appeared at the admitting station late on a cold winter night, homeless and helpless. Her feet were swollen. She wore a pair of flimsy house shoes. Raw leg ulcers made walking painful.

Her medical chart was thick. She'd been to the hospital many times before. We did what we always did—gave her a few hours in a warm bed, some antibiotics, a decent meal. But the next morning she had to go because according to the “rules” our job was done. So she limped out the door, straight back into the dark tunnel of problems she faced every day: No home. No job. Lousy food, and no family or friends to turn to for help.

Our care ended at the front door of the hospital, and that is so short-sighted. What if instead of ushering her back into the cold, we could have asked what she needed to keep from having to come back? And then what if we set her up—linked her to those people or services? In fact, why can't setting up patients with the help they need outside the medical setting be the fundamental goal of every visit?

That was my light bulb moment. And believe me, once that light of recognition turns on, you can't help but see the connections everywhere you look. You also realize this is not an issue faced only by the poor. If any of you have aging parents or an aging spouse, you know what I'm talking about.



Now then, think about our workplace culture that demands that we sit for way too long. We should make our workday healthier by making the automatic things we do just a little harder. Park farther away from the front door. Take the stairs. Hold standing or walking meetings. Take the time to connect to ideas, and to people, so you can take care of your mental health, as well as your physical health.

Let's think about the neighborhoods where moms don't dare encourage their kids to walk to school or play outside. Why can't we create human school buses, like they've done in Kingston, New York, where kids walk to school together as a group, supervised and protected by adults? And consider the health care providers who are doing the right thing by asking their patients about their lives outside the clinic, but just don't know how to connect their patients to needed services in the community.

And the family that knows it's important to give their toddlers intellectual stimulation, but is in the dark about where to start. Why can't pediatricians write prescriptions for parents to read *The Cat in the Hat*, or any other great book, out loud to their kids? In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics just yesterday issued new guidelines encouraging doctors to recommend reading out loud to children from birth.

When that light bulb clicks, you will see how deeply intertwined all these forces are. And you'll understand the prophetic role they play in our entire nation's health.

Now, I know that sometimes the light bulb moment can leave you feeling like there are just too many pieces to this jigsaw puzzle. But you wouldn't be here today if you didn't believe that even the most challenging puzzles can be solved by combining skill with will. And I wouldn't be here talking to you, if I didn't believe it, too.

There is an African proverb that teaches "the wise aim at boundaries beyond the present." So let me voice the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's idea right here, right now: That we, as a nation, will strive together to build a Culture of Health enabling all in our diverse society to lead healthy lives now and for generations to come.

That is our vision, and it is driving everything we do. But the truth is even though we are the nation's largest philanthropy dedicated to health, we don't make policy. We don't sell anything. And we don't deliver any health care services. The only power we have is the power to invest in you—in your ideas, your innovations, your dedication, and your collective will.

That is what is going to make a Culture of Health happen. Not me standing up here talking about it. But you, embracing the idea. Sharing it with others. And cranking up the volume on the nationwide call for change. When we work together to make health a national priority, that's when we can, and will, achieve a Culture of Health.

At RWJF we are focusing on a few key issues we feel are vital to achieving that goal.



- Seven years ago we committed \$500 million to reversing the childhood obesity epidemic in America. And the good news is we're starting to see real signs of progress.

But looking forward to 2024, we want to help the nation go even further, not just stopping the rise of obesity, but achieving a healthy weight for every child in America.

- We also want to help ensure that everyone who is eligible for health care coverage knows what benefits are available to them, and makes the most of their insurance.
- We want to help magnify healthy places and healthy practices across the country. And encourage businesses to take the lead in investing in the well-being of the communities they serve.

Of course, we also believe Americans need to insist on getting the highest value for every dollar that our nation spends on keeping us healthy—both inside and outside of medical offices. And that means reducing wasteful spending. It means stopping the hospital revolving door for people like Patient Ruth, by stressing the economic and human value of other factors like education, housing and transportation.

Now, let me stop here for one moment and share a conviction of the Foundation I lead—we will never be a healthy nation if we continue to be a violent one. Nor will we achieve a true Culture of Health if—through no fault of their own—some Americans are faced with much greater barriers to health than others.

Personal responsibility plays an important role in achieving and sustaining health. That's for sure. But nearly one in five Americans lives in neighborhoods with limited job opportunities, low-quality housing, pollution and unhealthy food options. And that means the deck is stacked against them from the start.

The idea of building a Culture of Health cannot, and will not, flourish unless the opportunity for health is available to everyone. I know that addressing all of these issues won't be easy. In fact we won't ever build a comprehensive Culture of Health if we just continue to tinker at the edges of our current systems. And that is why I'm here. Because I know you aren't about tinkering. You are about being bold, about drawing new maps, and about building a swell of voices demanding change.

We have to make a seismic shift in the way we deal with health, and it has to come from the ground up. We need to change our expectations as a nation. We need to recalibrate our behavior as individuals, so our children, and our children's children, will find it hard to believe there ever was a time when America didn't consider health as one of its most important values.

America prides itself on being a land of opportunity, and health is what makes those opportunities possible... for everyone.

So why do I think a shift of this magnitude is possible? Because it's happened before. And every



time it's happened it's grown from one idea.

Back in 1970, the year Earth Day was established, the word “recycling” wasn't part of our common vocabulary, much less a part of our lives. But people began asking why we were choking our land and our oceans with plastic, glass, and paper that could be collected and repurposed. And then they insisted on a change.

Today, we almost automatically separate paper, plastic and glass. And one reason is because we've made it easy. We've made recycling the default, with recycling containers on sidewalks, in stores, in schools, and in offices. In fact, nowadays most of us feel pretty guilty if we accidentally toss a can or bottle in the same container as our coffee grounds.

A shift also happened when 911 came to be. Believe it or not, there was a time when there was no single number to call in an emergency. When people injured on our highways fared more poorly than soldiers injured on the battlefield. They didn't get any first aid before they were wheeled into the Emergency Room. And the doctors at the hospital had no idea they were coming.

But that changed when somebody came up with the idea of creating a single, universal number and a system for connecting first responders to medical workers at the hospital. Simple idea. Revolutionary change.

Now, every child in America learns how to dial 911 almost as soon as they become infatuated with a mobile phone. And in some places you can text 911, too.

The point is these major shifts in our culture started out as ideas. So let's make a Culture of Health our next national idea. Let's make it the default, so one day we will look back with the same disbelief that our kids display when they ask: “Is it true that people actually used to smoke cigarettes in hospitals?”

In history, it's rare to recognize a moment of great change while you are living it. But here we are, quite aware that we are standing on the threshold of a new era. Big data. Bio-metrics. Crowd sourcing. Social entrepreneurship. It's all changing everything at lightning speed.

The famous science fiction writer William Gibson said: “The future is already here. It's just not evenly distributed.” And that is true when it comes to a Culture of Health. In a growing number of communities across the country change agents like you—people eager to turn ideas into action are already demonstrating what is possible.

Let me use a video to introduce you to Rebecca Onie. She has established a program called *Health Leads* that allows providers to prescribe resources like food and heat the same way they prescribe medication. And then college students help patients fill the prescriptions. As you can see, what this program does is care for individuals in a way that sets them up with what they need to get and stay healthy. And that is something we all should be aiming for.



Let me also tell you about the Rev. Michael Minor. He heads a congregation in Hernando, Mississippi. And not too long ago, he had the crazy idea that he would ban fried chicken from church suppers, because he was tired of conducting funerals for people dying from avoidable diseases.

Now, any of you who have ever spent any time in the Deep South know that fried chicken has been a church tradition for generations. But Pastor Minor was committed to leading his flock down a new path. Today, not only do his church suppers feature healthy pot-lucks, but there's also a walking track around the building, and a blood pressure monitor in the lobby. And what's more, the members of his church have now become "health ambassadors" in their county, spreading the good news of good health to others.

Someone else who is spreading the good news of health is Jill Violet. She is the founder of *Playworks*, a program that provides schools with structured play at recess. *Playworks* not only gets kids physically active, but also teaches them how to resolve disputes peacefully... and that means they don't bully. Here's a short video about that.

Looks like fun, doesn't it? Well, as a special treat *Playworks* is going to be on campus today offering play breaks to everyone. Find them, and give it a try.

Now, none of these people I just told you about are radical outliers. They didn't have millions of dollars at their disposal. They didn't have any special standing or extraordinary political clout. The only advantage they started with was a good idea, and the courage to question the status quo. And then they convinced others that they should be questioning it too.

In Nebraska, a company called Lincoln Industries questioned it: asking why workplace wellness should be so half-hearted and anemic. Lincoln is a mid-sized company that designs and produces high-performance metal-finished products for trucks, motorcycles, and marine vehicles. A very macho line of work.

But the culture of the company stresses caring for its workers' physical, financial and emotional health. Not only is there an onsite medical clinic, and a free gym, but the company also provides coaching for stress management and diabetes control as well as pregnancy education. It offers workers a 10-week class on how to set career, financial, and emotional goals. And a group of employees goes on an annual mountain-climbing trip with the CEO—all expenses paid.

One of their recent treks took them to the summit of Mount Elbert, the highest peak in Colorado. If you want to give it a try, I understand it's about 40 miles east of here. I'm sure it's a heck of a climb!

And out in the middle of the country, the state of Oklahoma dared to question the status quo too, asking why their kids had to live under the shadow of statistics showing that vulnerable children who don't get early intervention are 25 percent more likely to drop out of school. Forty percent more likely to become a teen parent. And 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime. They decided to take on the statistics by establishing a universal pre-K program that



provides free schooling for all of the state's children, starting when they are three years old.

The program has become so popular that even though Oklahoma is one of the most tax-conservative states in the union, public funding for pre-K has been repeatedly approved by Republicans and Democrats alike. That's how a powerful idea can unify people across the aisles.

The truth is there is no single way to cultivate of a Culture of Health. Your community is going to build the Culture of Health that serves it best. And that's the way it should be. Last year, RWJF had the idea of introducing a prize to honor and highlight communities that have placed a priority on the health of their citizens.

In each of these places ordinary citizens have driven the change, with the help of business, organizations, and government. They've formed powerful partnerships because they care about their neighbors. And they've made a deep commitment to stick with it until they see success. I'm talking about places as economically and geographically different as New Orleans and Santa Cruz, California.

Later today we'll be awarding the *2014 Culture of Health Prize* to six communities as part of the Ideas Festival. Please come on out and meet these folks. They are the people that have convinced me that we can, and will, build a Culture of Health stretching from California to Maine. They'll inspire you, too. And they'll help you figure out how to turn your ideas into sustainable change.

Building a Culture of Health in America is going to take all of us working together toward a common goal. It's going to require that we build new partnerships, and stand on one another's shoulders so we can turn small victories into national success. That we help one another by spotlighting and supporting initiatives that are working. And by learning from those that are not.

It's not going to be easy. In fact, it's going to be hard. But if we combine passion with purpose, we can forever expand the definition of health. And raise the health of all Americans to the level that this great nation deserves. I can't wait to hear your ideas. And then—to put them into action!

When I imagine 2024, I see a nation of deeply determined people moving arm in arm toward a Culture of Health that enables all in our diverse society to lead healthy lives. And when we get there we will, indeed, have a powerful story to tell. A story we can all start writing today.

Thank you.