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IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATE FRAMING

Depending on how any issue is framed, it can have an impact on how: a problem will be defined, its etiology will be delineated, and remedies will be formulated. In an article published in the January 30, 1981 issue of the journal *Science*, a pair of Israeli psychologists, **Daniel Kahneman** and **Amos Tversky**, shed early light on the relevance of this topic by discussing how health messages can be framed in either the benefits of engaging in a recommended behavior (gain-framed messages) or the costs of not engaging in that behavior (loss-framed messages). Although conveying essentially identical information, one form of message-framing may be more effective at promoting health behavior change than the other.

For example, they conducted a study in which they asked respondents to imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 victims. Two alternative programs to combat the disease were proposed. These researchers found that choices involving gains are often risk averse and choices involving losses are often risk taking. The only effective difference between the two programs is that outcomes were described in one problem by the number of lives saved and in the other by the number of lives lost. Kahneman's doctorate is from Berkeley and while serving at Princeton, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002 for his body of work. Tversky died in 1996. Nobel awards are not made posthumously.

Unlike their study, today the world actually continues to experience the ill effects of a coronavirus pandemic. As a means of preventing a future outbreak of a highly deadly communicable disease, it is important to learn how COVID-19 originated. One school of thought proposes that the cause was natural, resulting from the consumption of food by humans in the form of bat and pangolin meat sold in wet markets in China. An entirely different frame asks whether the disease emerged as a result of a leak in a Wuhan virology laboratory where gain-of-function research was conducted to convert a virus into a more deadly and transmissible form. Each frame differs considerably from the perspective of the kinds of effective safeguards to construct to prevent the appearance of a similar pandemic anytime in the future.

Another major concern of policymakers in the U.S. is an opioid epidemic that continues to produce fatal consequences for users of addictive substances. One approach is to frame the problem as a health issue. Corrective measures might focus on: prevention, development of improved treatment protocols, increased financial support for recovery facilities, and discovery of less addictive substances and more effective non-medication kinds of interventions to reduce levels of pain. An entirely different approach would be to frame the opioid problem as essentially being of a law enforcement nature. Proposed remedies could include tighter restrictions at the nation's southern border to prohibit the criminal activity of drug cartels and the infliction of harsher penalties when drug dealers are apprehended. Perhaps implementing a combination of the two approaches might work best, but when resources are limited, it may be necessary to select one choice to the possible detriment of the other alternative.



THE CHALLENGING ROAD TO ENACTING LAWS

Each year, thousands of bills are introduced in Congress. The 1st Session of the 117th Congress in 2021 is no exception. As of August 13 this year, 5,039 bills were introduced in the House and 2,712 in the Senate as of August 11. Any measure perceived as being of great national importance may undergo certain stages. Once it is referred to a particular committee, members of that group may invite both government and non-government experts to testify at a public hearing about the necessity of having such legislation be enacted into law. A related step is to have the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) produce a *score* regarding a proposal's potential budgetary impact.

Although this information may come from numerous sources, according to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), Congress generally relies on estimates provided by CBO and the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) when determining whether proposed legislation complies with congressional budgetary rules. Generally, CBO and JCT estimates include projections of the budgetary effects that would result from proposed policy changes, and incorporate anticipated individual behavioral responses to the policy. The estimates, however, do not typically include the macroeconomic effects of those individual behavioral responses that would alter gross domestic product (GDP). In recent decades, Congress sometimes has required that JCT and CBO provide estimates that incorporate such macroeconomic effects on overall economic output. i.e., GDP. These estimates often are referred to as dynamic estimates or dynamic scores.

A good example of proposed legislation that recently underwent this level of scrutiny is *H.R. 3684, The INVEST in America Act*. It was introduced in the House on June 4, 2021 and was passed by the Senate on a 69-30 Yea-Nay Vote on August 10. This bill addresses provisions related to federal-aid highway, transit, highway safety, motor carrier, research, hazardous materials, and rail programs of the Department of Transportation (DOT). CBO found that the roughly \$1 trillion infrastructure bill would widen the budget deficit by \$256 billion over 10 years, which is in contrast to bill negotiators' claims that the cost of the legislation would be covered by new revenue and savings measures. Legislators who supported passage indicated that the CBO assessment does not reflect savings and additional revenue identified in other estimates, noting that the agency is limited in what it can include in its formal score.

Whether H.R. 3684 will be enacted into law depends on whether a second piece of major legislation favored by Democrats that is considered as complementary to H.R. 3684, and estimated by its supporters as costing \$3.5 trillion, also is approved by Congress. Senate Democrats approved a budget resolution (*Senate Concurrent Resolution 14*) for that amount on August 11. These large sums of money call to mind two sagacious aphorisms. One of them was made by **Niels Bohr**, a Danish scientist who won a Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922. He stated, "Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future," a comment that is quite apropos in the context of estimating projected legislative revenues and costs over the next 10 years. Former Senate Minority Leader (from 1959-1969) **Everett Dirksen** (R-IL) once quipped at a time when a billion dollars seemed like an enormous amount of money, "A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking about real money."

2021-2022 ASSOCIATION CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October 18-19, 2021—Leadership Development Program—Session I in Long Beach, CA

October 20-22, 2021—ASAHP Annual Conference in Long Beach, CA

May 12-13, 2022—Leadership Development Program—Session II in Columbus, OH

October 19-21, 2022—ASAHP Annual Conference in Long Beach, CA

HEALTH REFORM DEVELOPMENTS

According to a new report from The Commonwealth Fund entitled, *Mirror, Mirror 2021: Reflecting Poorly*, the U.S. health system trails far behind its counterparts in 10 high-income peer countries when it comes to affordability, administrative efficiency, equity, and health care outcomes. Unique in measuring and comparing patient and clinician experiences across nations, the report shows that in the U.S., an individual's chance of obtaining good health care depends to a large extent on income, more so than in any other wealthy country. The U.S., which spends the most per individual on health care, has ranked last in every edition of the report since 2004. Also, this nation has fallen even further behind on certain measures, especially health outcomes linked to primary care access and equity in care delivery.

Readers of this issue of ASAHP's newsletter who have grown long in the tooth over the decades may recall a popular tune performed by Creedence Clearwater Revival in 1969 called *Bad Moon Rising*. Some of its lyrics are:

I see the bad moon a-rising
I see trouble on the way
I see earthquakes and lightnin'
I see bad times today

Oddly enough, despite the negative appraisal of health care in the U.S., this nation is distinguished by having world class centers that attract patients from all over the globe who seek the best in what these facilities have to offer. A major problem is that not all U.S. inhabitants are in a position to have equal access to such high quality care due to a factor, such as lack of adequate health insurance. Another relevant circumstance is what has been labeled "deaths of despair." **Angus Deaton** and **Anne Case** at Princeton University have been successful highlighting a rise in mortality rates caused by inappropriate drug use, suicide, and alcoholic liver disease. They have noted that expected years lived between ages 25 and 75 declined for most of a decade for men and women without a four-year degree, even prior to the arrival of COVID-19. An article they wrote in the March 16, 2021 issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences in the USA* discusses the link between possessing a college degree and the opportunity to obtain jobs that provide sufficient income. Ensuring the attainment of suitable levels of education, adequate employment prospects, decent housing, impact of discrimination, lack of necessary health resources in rural areas, and low crime neighborhoods are some multifactorial examples of the complex nature underlying efforts to improve individual and community health status.

State Initiatives To Improve Health Care

Because of its involvement in research funded by the National Institutes of Health, the financing of health services through Medicare, and the direct provision of such services through various government entities that include the Veterans Administration, the federal government rightly attracts significant attention when discussing health policy issues. Nonetheless, states around the nation also play key fundamental roles in attempts to foster a healthy population. Since taking office, the **Biden administration** has tried to enhance the Affordable Care Act (ACA) by reversing policies implemented when **Donald Trump** was President, such as the latter's decision to eliminate a policy encouraging standardized health plan designs for marketplace coverage. Researchers at the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute believe that the federal government can learn from examining how states are using plan standardization to improve access to care. For example, cost barriers could be lowered by exempting critical primary care or mental health services from deductibles.

In a separate related arena, the Pew Charitable Trusts in its *Legislative Review 2021*, points out that local and state public health officials wield extraordinary powers in emergency situations, such as the present coronavirus outbreak. They can close schools and private businesses. They can restrict or shut down mass transit systems. They can cancel concerts, sporting events and political rallies. They can call up the National Guard when necessary. They can suspend medical licensing laws and protect physicians from liability claims. Not only can they quarantine or isolate some individuals who might infect others, they have the authority to implement policies that involve social distancing and the wearing of masks.

DEVELOPMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Approximately 23 million student-loan borrowers have benefited from a moratorium policy, which temporarily enables them to withhold making monthly payments on their federal debt load. Relating to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the pause on loan repayments and interest accrual went into effect on March 13, 2020 and was extended once to the end of that year. **President Biden** then extended it until September 30, 2021. In August, the moratorium was extended until January 31, 2022. It pertains to all loans held by the U.S. Department of Education, including Stafford, Grad PLUS, and consolidation loans. Some loans that originated under the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) are not eligible, however, since they are owned by private lenders.

Prior to these pauses, many students as a result of being unemployed or working in low paying jobs have found it impossible to pay their educational debts. Prominent Democrats have recommended using executive power to cancel as much as \$50,000 of this debt for each borrower, while **President Biden** has indicated that it would be fair to do so in the amount of \$10,000. Many congressional Republicans are less eager to provide such levels of relief. Depending on an individual's status, debt has a differential impact on borrowers. One group of students who owe money consists partly of individuals who left school prior to completing degree programs. They are least likely to derive income from employment that enables them to pay back their loans. Another group is made up of students who might have debt as high as hundreds of thousands of dollars, but as graduates of post baccalaureate degree programs in medicine, law, and business, they are in a much stronger position to earn high paying salaries upon completing school.

Addressing The Educational Needs Of The Incarcerated

Individuals who enter penal institutions are not in an especially advantageous position to return to society upon being released from incarceration with a set of job skills in high demand by the employment sector. Instead, a further life of crime may be the only realistic way of producing income. Congress instituted a ban on the use of federal Pell Grants by incarcerated students in the *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322)*. According to The Education Trust, the number of education programs in prisons subsequently dropped from more than 350 in 1990 to only a dozen in 2005. The percentage of incarcerated individuals participating in postsecondary education programs also dropped from 14% in 1991 to 7% in 2004.

The situation improved to some degree in December 2020 when Congress passed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Simplification Act, which reinstated prisoners' access to Pell Grants. A next step is for the U.S. Department of Education to reverse Pell Grant restrictions. Otherwise, attainment of a college degree for prisoners remains challenging. The Education Trust indicates that correctional education programs reduce the rate of recidivism by 43%, increase the rate of employment after release by 13%, and are associated with fewer violent incidents in participating prisons. These programs are considered to result in net savings to taxpayers and are significantly more cost-efficient than incarceration alone. They also represent an essential strategy for breaking the cycles of incarceration and poverty, and helping formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society.

New Negotiated Rulemaking Committee Meeting

The U.S. Department of Education on August 6, 2021 announced it will publish a notice in the *Federal Register* establishing a negotiated rulemaking committee that will meet virtually beginning in October of this year to rewrite regulations for Public Service Loan forgiveness, income-contingent repayment plans, and borrower defense to repayment, among other issues. These regulations will help borrowers manage repayment or receive a discharge or forgiveness of their federal student loans. The committee also will establish regulations to implement Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated individuals, which will be discussed in a subcommittee. In the notice, the Department requests nominations for negotiators and subcommittee members and sets dates for negotiation sessions.

QUICK STAT (SHORT, TIMELY, AND TOPICAL)

Provisional Life Expectancy Estimates For 2020

A report from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in July 2021 presents updated estimates of life expectancy based on provisional mortality data for the full year, January through December, 2020. Life expectancy at birth represents the average number of years a group of infants would live if they were to experience throughout life the age specific death rates prevailing during a specified period. In 2020, life expectancy at birth for the total U.S. population was 77.3 years, declining by 1.5 years from 78.8 in 2019. Life expectancy at birth for males was 74.5 years in 2020, representing a decline of 1.8 years from 76.3 years in 2019. For females, life expectancy declined to 80.2 years, decreasing 1.2 years from 81.4 years in 2019. The difference in life expectancy between the sexes was 5.7 years in 2020, increasing from 5.1 in 2019. Between 2000 and 2010, the difference in life expectancy between the sexes narrowed from 5.2 years to a low of 4.8 years and then gradually increased to 5.1 in 2019.

COVID-19's Impact On Black Versus White Households

According to the results of a *Pulse Household Survey* released on July 21, 2021 by the U.S. Census Bureau, the coronavirus pandemic has produced higher rates of economic and mental health hardship for non-Hispanic Black adults (referred to as Black) than for non-Hispanic White adults (referred to as White) across several measures. Interpreting the results requires disentangling racial identity from other underlying conditions, such as poverty, lack of health insurance, and the greater likelihood in jobs where there is a higher risk of both infection and unemployment during the pandemic. The data suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected Black households more adversely because the cumulative effects of job loss, food insufficiency, and financial insecurity resulted in uncertainty about how to pay for housing as well as more generalized anxiety. The fact that Black adults have been more likely than White adults to borrow money to make ends meet suggests that the pandemic's impact may be prolonged as debts mount.

HEALTH TECHNOLOGY CORNER

Core Outcomes For Patients Living With Long COVID

A significant portion of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 subsequently experience lasting symptoms that include fatigue, breathlessness, and neurological complications months after the acute infection. Evidence for this condition is limited, however, and is based on small patient cohorts with short-term follow-up. An urgent need exists for the development of a core outcome set (COS) to optimize and standardize clinical data collection and reporting across studies and clinical practice. An international group of experts has developed a program of research with patient partners and the WHO called ISARIC (International Severe Acute Respiratory and emerging Infection Consortium) to develop a Post COVID-19 Condition COS. *Post-COVID-19 Condition Core Outcomes* will begin by surveying individuals living with the Post-COVID-19 condition, assess what outcomes matter, and build a plan in two phases. Phase One in 2021 will focus on what outcomes should be measured while Phase Two in 2022 will focus on how to measure these outcomes.

Longitudinal Association Of Total Tau Concentrations And Physical Activity With Cognitive Decline

Tau is a brain protein located in neurons and develops abnormally in individuals with Alzheimer disease. A study described on August 11 in *JAMA Network Open* describes an evaluation of the association of physical activity and total tau concentrations with cognitive decline at baseline and over time. Participants in the investigation are involved with the Chicago Health and Aging Project, a population-based cohort study conducted in four of that city's communities. Study findings suggest that, among participants with both high and low total tau concentrations, physical activity was associated with slower cognitive decline. Results support the potential utility of blood biomarkers in measuring the benefits associated with health behaviors and may contribute to specifying target populations or informing interventions for trials that focus on improving physical activity behavior. A recommendation is that future work should examine the association of total tau concentrations with other health behaviors and physical activity types.

OBTAINABLE RESOURCES

Federal Policy Priorities For The Direct Care Workforce

PHI has released a report entitled, "Federal Policy Priorities for the Direct Care Workforce." The document offers an extensive and detailed set of federal policy recommendations for that portion of the workforce. Throughout the United States, millions of direct care workers—home care workers, residential care aides, and nursing assistants—ensure that older adults and patients with disabilities have the support they need across care settings. The report proposes federal policy recommendations to strengthen the direct care workforce across eight issue areas: financing, compensation, training, workforce interventions, data collection, direct care worker leadership, equity, and the public narrative. The report also offers nearly 50 concrete recommendations for the White House, Congress, and key federal departments and agencies. It includes recommendations for navigating and learning from COVID-19. The report can be obtained at [Federal-Policy-Priorities-for-the-Direct-Care-Workforce-2021-PHI \(2\).pdf](#).

Reducing The Impact Of Dementia In The United States

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) have released a report detailing the path forward for the next 10 years of research on dementia in the behavioral and social sciences. The NASEM report recommends that research prioritize improving the lives of patients affected by dementia and of their caregivers; rectifying disparities; developing innovations that can improve quality of care and social supports; easing the economic costs of dementia; and pursuing advances in researchers' ability to study the disease. The report also indicates that research will be most effective if it is coordinated to avoid redundant studies; ensures findings can be implemented in clinical and community settings; and takes policy and socio-economic implications into account throughout the course of a study. Funders of dementia-related research should incentivize these approaches and others in their guidelines for awarding research grants. The report can be obtained at [Front Matter | Reducing the Impact of Dementia in America: A Decadal Survey of the Behavioral and Social Sciences | The National Academies Press \(nap.edu\)](#).

The Future Of American Higher Education

The Director of the Georgetown University Center On Education And The Workforce offers his assessment of how the COVID crisis will result in long-term economic scarring of both individual students and postsecondary institutions in America. Viewed in the context of what might come next for postsecondary education, his sense is that COVID is just the beginning. As the pandemic subsides, it will open the way to demographic, economic, and policy changes that already were gaining momentum. He indicated that today's postsecondary education and training system has become a new gearwheel, arguably the biggest gearwheel, in the American race and class inequality machine. The available evidence suggests that these two trends, the growing value of postsecondary education and its role in replicating race and class privilege, will continue and likely strengthen in the coming years. His views can be obtained at [The Future of American Higher Education | by Anthony P. Carnevale | Georgetown CEW | Aug, 2021 | Medium](#).

Can Health Organizations Improve Health Equity?

A report from the firm Deloitte addresses the question, "Can health care organizations move beyond lip service and take the steps needed to improve health equity?" The care patients receive and the outcomes they experience still can vary widely by race, age, income, ethnicity, gender, and even ZIP code. So, an issue worth exploring is whether health organizations can advance health equity. The report can be obtained at [Can Health Care Organizations move Beyond Lip Service and take the Steps Needed to Improve Health Equity? | Deloitte US](#).

LANGUAGE CHOICE IN REDUCING STIGMA AROUND HEALTH CONDITIONS

Words used to describe mental illnesses and substance use disorders (addiction to alcohol and other legal and illegal drugs) can have an impact on the likelihood that individuals will seek help and the quality of the care they receive. Stigma, i.e., negative attitudes toward persons based on distinguishing characteristics may contribute in multiple ways to poorer health outcomes. An article published on July 19, 2021 in the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology* indicates that researchers and clinicians can help reduce stigma by carefully choosing the words they use to describe mental health conditions and addictions and the patients who are affected by them. Mental illnesses and substance use disorders always have been among the most stigmatized of health conditions. Because language can shape thoughts and beliefs, scientific communication sometimes may serve as an inadvertent vector of harmful stereotypes and assumptions.

A concern is that bias among medical professionals and mental health service providers can reduce the likelihood that individuals with mental illnesses will be offered or receive appropriate treatment or be referred for specialty care. Stigma against individuals with substance use disorders has proven particularly intractable. The public continues to see these disorders as character flaws or even as deviance, contributing to a treatment-averse mindset even among some physicians and health care providers. For example, some clinicians were more likely to favor punishment (a jail sentence) versus treatment for someone when that individual was described as a “substance abuser” versus having a “substance use disorder. Instead, using scientifically accurate language and terms that centralize the experience of patients who experience psychiatric conditions and that validate their worth can positively affect how they are treated within health care and in society more generally.

Similarly, the August 2021 issue of the journal *The Gerontologist* includes a paper discussing how in research Alzheimer’s Disease (AD) is referred to as a pathophysiological process, regardless of whether clinical symptoms are present, whereas in the lay literature, it is understood as a form of dementia. The two different uses of the term may result in misunderstandings, especially those research framings that falsely imply that patients with AD biomarkers inevitably will develop dementia. Adoption of the research understanding of AD in clinical practice will have normative implications, e.g., it legitimizes biomarker testing in individuals without dementia as improving “diagnostic” certainty.

INCONSISTENT COMMUNICATION ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINES

According to a manuscript published in the July 2021 issue of the *Journal of Communication in Healthcare*, inconsistent communication about COVID-19 from public officials has created mistrust and confusion about public health recommendations, which has contributed to increased mortality in the United States. National, state, and local leaders have offered conflicting narratives about the seriousness of the pandemic, the steps needed to contain it, and the safety of the vaccines that are being administered. Much conflict has been over the choice of public health safety or the need to keep businesses and schools open. Framing this binary choice between public safety and the economy may be presenting a false dichotomy since containing the spread of COVID-19 is a prerequisite for a strong economy and a return to normal activities.

Language is viewed as playing an important role in the likelihood of motivating individuals to follow science-based public health recommendations and feel more confident about taking a COVID-19 vaccine. By a margin of 61% to 39%, one poll showed that respondents said the benefits of taking the vaccine would be more likely to motivate them than the consequences of not taking it. Moreover, gaining trust is particularly vital when communicating with members of vulnerable, marginalized, and underserved communities who regularly face systemic barriers and discrimination. Polling also examined differences in words that are likely to build trust about COVID-19 vaccines among Black and Latinx respondents. Overall, when these individuals were asked to choose the words that would give them the most trust and confidence in the COVID-19 vaccine (from a list of 12), the two most popular words were “advanced” and “groundbreaking.” Among Black respondents, however, the most preferred word was “innovative,” and for Latinx respondents, “unprecedented” was the first choice.