FORESIGHT
Designing a Future for Health

Scanning the Health and Well-Being Horizon

Trends and Emerging Issues Represented in the FORESIGHT Scenarios

In 2019, FORESIGHT's academically trained futurists conducted a scan of the health and well-being horizon to understand how the United States could be impacted by various trends and emerging issues in the future. They looked at a wide range of information sources, including academic literature, news stories, and other media.

We took that scan to a diverse group of individuals from across the country who came from different parts of the health and well-being system and brought their professional and lived experience to bear on the question of which changes had the greatest potential to transform health in the future. The trends and emerging issues that they lifted up as most important and transformative were woven into four alternative future scenarios—stories of possible futures designed to provoke imaginations and inspire conversations about our aspirations for the future.

Below, we have summarized those trends and emerging issues in a few sentences each. These descriptions offer just a taste of the nuance and depth available in the full report.

Trends

Trends *are changes over time we can already measure. Many of these seem familiar as they represent historical patterns of change shaping our system of health and well-being.*

1. **Income and Wealth Gaps Continue to Widen**: Income and wealth inequality are continuing to worsen, particularly along race and ethnicity lines. The wealth gap poses a generational barrier to equity, as the amount of wealth a person can hand down to their children is greatly influenced by racial and ethnic inequities.
2. **Runaway Healthcare Spending**: Healthcare spending is rising worldwide, but the US has poorer health outcomes than other high-income countries, despite spending almost double per capita what those countries spend.
3. **Growing Rates of Anxiety, Depression, and Suicide**: Anxiety, depression, and suicide rates are increasing across the US.
4. **US's Changing Cultural Values**: Americans are increasingly dissatisfied with key aspects of US society, have become more liberal in their views of what is morally acceptable, and are more concerned about health and the environment.
5. **Innovation in Medicine and Health is Accelerating**: The pace of innovation in medicine and health continues to accelerate, raising issues of equal access, ethics, and risk assessment.

Emerging Issues

Emerging Issues *are potential trends—they haven't happened yet, but we can detect faint signs that they could be on the horizon and may shape our system of health and well-being in profound ways.*

1. **It Takes a Village**: A new kind of communal living is emerging and may replace the nuclear family.
2. **Climate Crisis Impacts Health of Most Vulnerable**: Climate crisis health impacts could rapidly increase and challenge the preparedness of our healthcare system, and the poor will be disproportionately affected.
3. **Sugar is the New Tobacco**: Growing scientific evidence on the health impacts of sugar may result in policies banning its use.

4. **Personalized Medicine**: From “up-to-the-second” shareable health data to medication designed for specific genes, all aspects of healthcare may be personalized.
5. **Climate Migrants and Adaptation**: The impacts of climate change and adaptation could drive population migration and worsen inequality.
6. **End of Meat in Global Food Supply**: The evolution of sustainable global food supply chains away from meat production could lead to improved health, well-being, and resilience in low-income communities globally.
7. **Disparity of Climate Crisis Impacts on Food**: Increasing stress on food supply chains, due to the global climate crisis, is likely to disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable people.
8. **Radical Transparency**: Opening up data and sharing everything about everything could bring significant transparency and significant challenges.
9. **Humans Training Machines to Train Humans**: Continual mechanical and AI advancement means machines are likely to perform complex, sophisticated tasks better than humans, and in turn teach humans better ways to perform those tasks and access knowledge.
10. **A Changing Understanding of and Response to Racism**: Antiracism, which calls for the overhaul of system-embedded racist policies, could influence society’s ability to achieve equity.
11. **Co-ops at the End of Capitalism**: Inequality, automation, and rising communalism may create an economy based on shared ownership beyond capitalism.
12. **Digital Alienation**: An increasing reliance on big data analytics, financial technologies, and smart technologies could lead to alienation of marginalized populations.

Supporting Trends and Emerging Issues

Elements of these trends and emerging issues also appear in the FORESIGHT scenarios, though they are not the main drivers of change.

Trends

1. **Accelerating Biodiversity Loss**: Human activity around the world is pushing an increasing number of species toward extinction, with significant ramifications for human health, including undermining food security and clean water.
2. **Climate Change is Becoming Increasingly Costly**: The number and cost of climate-driven weather disasters is increasing, straining the US’s ability to cope.
3. **The US is Becoming Increasingly Diverse**: The US is undergoing a demographic transition from a majority white population to a population without a single majority group—a transition that could either herald a more liberal and inclusive society or an even more polarized society with growing divides along ethnic, racial, and generational lines.
4. **Health Care is Becoming Increasingly Digital and Distributed**: From telemedicine to one-stop-shopping for health, the spread of smart, digital technologies into every aspect of life is also transforming the delivery of healthcare services.
5. **Expanding Health Deserts and the Divide Between Urban and Rural**: The loss of rural healthcare providers is worsening existing disparities in health outcomes between rural and urban populations.

Emerging Issues

1. **The New Job Market**: More flexible work arrangements “gigifying” the job market could have significant implications for the future of work.
2. **Digital Alienation**: An increasing reliance on big data analytics, financial technologies, and smart technologies could lead to alienation of certain sub-populations.
3. **A New End of Life**: New intersections between palliative care and the death care industry may change cultural end-of-life traditions.

4. **Automation Driving Macroeconomic Reform**: Massive inequality may drive government to transform domestic economic policy and consider new fiscal policies, such as implementing basic income and ending services for profit.
5. **Food as Medicine and Social and Ecological Justice**: Prompted by climate impacts and medical needs, the way people eat could increasingly be seen both as medicine and as necessary to address social inequality and the climate crisis.
6. **End of Personal Privacy**: In a world where people increasingly share their personal lives online, privacy concerns abound.
7. **Turn Back to One Another: Rising Value of Care Work**: Automation means people might have more time. It could also make caregiving easier amidst increasing demand. Yet layered alongside automation's potential to decrease income, people could potentially turn their attention to family care.
8. **Biased Algorithms**: Humans embed bias in what they build, and it can last for generations.
9. **Civil Rights-Based Disability Framework**: Individuals with disabilities could bring about a new social model for disability that prioritizes rights-based accommodations and removes structural barriers.
10. **Redefining Childbearing**: Exo-wombs could change traditional structures and presumptions around childbearing.
11. **Zoonotic Outbreaks Become the New Normal**: Zoonotic infections (diseases, such as Covid-19, that original from animals) could become more frequent, severe, and widespread as more human populations displaced by the climate crisis are exposed to different species.

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