

## WELLNESS RX SPECIAL REPORT: A NEW AMERICA

As we end 2022 and come to terms with a worldwide pandemic that has killed over one million Americans, it's now time to reflect on some of the changes, new norms and challenges that our society will face in the years ahead. Some changes will be positive, some negative, but we will be creating *A New America* that generations to come will be shaped by. Here's some of the important trends that we are watching and the myriad of questions we should ask ourselves and our community leaders.

Wellness Rx, a Pharmacy for the Public Good, believes strongly in community and the strength of its partners in education and learning, community planning with forethought, healthcare and wellness. Please digest this special report, develop solutions and share your thoughts with others to help improve and strengthen our communities. We have all shared challenges in the past few years and there will be more, but as we have done before and as a nation we will do better going forward and creating positive change for tomorrow's children.

- 1). Historically, the youth of a society often rise-up to demand change and to plant the seeds for their future. The last American uprising occurred during the Vietnam era when our youth demanded an end to the war and a record number wanted to "help the public good". Many became teachers, public officials, health care professionals, joined activist organizations like the Peace Corps or became volunteers. Will today's youth spark another uprising to help plant their dreams for a more fair, equitable and kinder tomorrow?
- 2). Health care remains the prime generator of our economy and our wellbeing. We end 2022, with health care spending at eighteen and a half percent (18.5%) of our wealth and accounting for over thirteen percent (13%) of all our jobs, especially solid jobs for entry-level employees. While the healthcare industry has historically been a stable employer, and most economists look to health care jobs as an important growth industry for our economy, COVID has rattled the industry with record numbers of early retirements and a burned-out workforce trying to keep up. We also now have a larger medically uninsured population, an overall lower life expectancy (COVID deaths; higher suicides, homicides and drug overdoses) and health care services have rapidly consolidated with a small number of health care systems controlling each regional market in America. These health systems are powerful and have a clear push to locate services within urban centers at the expense of rural communities. Will we be able to rise above the challenges and make the changes needed to deliver high quality equitable services to our citizens at competitive prices? Will we start to see new models for providing care such as tele-medicine, at-home care? Will an emphasis on primary care/wellness become our new norms? Or, will our government be forced to step in to legislate our future?
- 3). Both primary and secondary education has been pushed to the limit. Pre-school enrollments are down, home schooling is up, mental health challenges are raging especially related to school safety and student socialization, teachers are retiring in record numbers, parents are angry and even private colleges are being challenged to reinvent themselves. Will we see creative ways to help students "catch-up" from the isolation and fear of COVID? Will we see a

reinvention of public education or will we see a rapid expansion of private schools and homeschooling? Will we see a new respect for promising careers that don't require a college degree?

4). The housing of Americans is in crisis with too many families spending more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities. Will we see more government intervention with rent control laws and laws to regulate disruptive initiatives like the growing Airbnb industry? Will we see more unmarried couples living together and more joint living arrangements among our seniors and young adults? Will we see more public housing and more employers providing housing for their employees? Will we see a declining rural America or will we see the rebuilding of communities where Main Street and social connections are important values for living together in harmony?

5). Will technology be our friend or enemy? Will at-home work, zoom calls, online school, online shopping and social media applications be our new normal? Will we find ways to manage technology, use it wisely and still keep our priorities on caring about each other as we live together on a fragile planet?

6). Our economy remains a changing story day-by-day. Will we come out of COVID with a goal of building a new and stronger economy built on a firmer foundation of American-based manufacturing jobs? Or, will we continue to place our bets on a fragile service industry and overseas supply networks? If we want the former, we must have the patience required to build this firmer foundation that will be heavily loaded with infrastructure, technology, environmental and chipmaking investments with the goal of producing sustainable higher paying jobs and community development (generational benefits). Our new economy must also ensure a better distribution of well-paying jobs throughout America especially in rural communities and blue collar occupations.

7). Coming out of COVID, we remain a society on edge with over fifty percent (50%) of Americans reporting that they are struggling with one or more mental health challenges. Will we be there for each other? Will the social networks formed during COVID strengthen and grow or will they just fade away? Will acts of kindness or moments or unexpected grace that calms the soul and re-centers a human being become a new norm for our citizens? Will the trend towards activities that bring human beings joy like gardening continue to flourish (over twenty (20) million Americans planted a vegetable garden for the first time during the pandemic) or will we go back to a darker norm that forces us to live on the edge of fear, loneliness and divisiveness?

8). Finally, most Americans agree on the need for a strong America and the need to protect our ideals, our history, and our promise. Will we find common ground to reaffirm our commitment to protect our democracy? Will we find common ground on how we see and feel what really being an American is all about in the year 2022? Or will we start to self-destruct as a civil society and be forced to go through years of pain and violence before we rebuild again?