

It's the world's leading killer. Make it the focus of the next breakthrough.

By Tom Frieden *Washington Post* February 7, 2024

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In 2023, the weight-loss drug Wegovy and similar medications were a scientific and cultural — and profit-making — breakthrough. Allowing patients to shed weight without diet or exercise, they are a rare bright spot in efforts to reverse obesity. They also reduce heart disease.

But what if we had medications that cost 5,000 times less and are better at preventing heart attacks and strokes? And what if only 1 in 5 people who need these medications get them?

That's the situation with drugs to treat high blood pressure — and it needs to change. Hypertension, the “silent killer,” is the deadliest but most neglected and widespread pandemic of our time, killing more than 10 million people a year worldwide. More than a third of deaths from high blood pressure occur in adults younger than 70 years old and this proportion is even higher in low-income countries.

Yet less than one half of 1 percent of global health funds go to fighting hypertension. Money matters. HIV prevention and treatment programs led by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief have prevented 25 million deaths. Childhood vaccines prevent millions of deaths every year. Bloomberg Philanthropies supports country action projected to prevent at least 35 million deaths by the end of this decade. Hypertension could be the next big global health win. But it urgently needs focus and funding.

Hypertension can be prevented and treated. Prevention includes reducing sodium and increasing potassium intake, for example, through use of potassium-enriched low-sodium salts. Low-sodium salt is more expensive than standard table salt and might require regulatory measures, promotion and subsidies, at least at first, to ensure wide adoption. For those who need treatment, there are safe, inexpensive generic drugs that can cost just pennies a day or less.

Better hypertension control can save millions of lives each year — more than any other adult health-care intervention. Effective treatment programs use a step-by-step guide for prescribing medication, ensure drug supply, use health-care teams including nurses, and make services free and convenient. These programs also track blood pressure control rates

every month; simple digital systems help health-care workers improve patient care and increase control rates.

Every health leader — and any political leader concerned about health — should focus on a single number: The proportion of all people living with hypertension who are documented to have it under control. A global goal is to treat half of all those with hypertension effectively — i.e., reducing blood pressure to 140/90 or less. (For some people, a lower target such as 130/80 is appropriate.)

Today, that number is at most 1 in 5. In the United States, it's less than half. Only four countries — Canada, Costa Rica, Iceland and South Korea — provide effective treatment to even half of those who need it.

Improving global hypertension control to 50 percent of all who have the condition would prevent 2 million deaths each year and 200 million strokes and heart attacks over the next 25 years. Doing so would also save billions of dollars in averted hospitalizations, disability and lost productivity.

How Biden Could Act on the Border and Help Himself in November

John B. Judis *New York Times* Feb. 9, 2024

Mr. Judis is a co-author of "Where Have All the Democrats Gone?"

The Senate killed the bipartisan proposal to curb illegal immigration, but as President Biden's Republican critics have suggested, he can, on his own authority, take measures that will limit the number of undocumented workers crossing the border.

If given sufficient fanfare, these measures could help Mr. Biden and the Democrats in November. They are also well worth doing for their own sake.

Still, those measures alone aren't sufficient to put in place a long-term structure to bring order to the border and our immigration system. To do that, Congress also will eventually have to act.

Mr. Biden has authority to act under [Section 212\(f\)](#) of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, which [says](#) that the president can "suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens" whose entry he finds "would be detrimental to the interests of the United States." In 2018, when the Supreme Court [ruled in Trump v. Hawaii](#) against challenges to the administration's Muslim travel ban, it declared that this provision in the 1952 law "exudes deference to the president."

Out of the more than three million attempted crossings by undocumented migrants at the southern border in fiscal year 2023, the roughly 2.5 million who got through have created a tremendous fiscal burden on our border as well as in cities and states not only in the Southwest but also in the Midwest and Northeast. Many of these migrants have joined an underclass of workers whom employers have over the decades exploited mercilessly to bring down wages in farming, meatpacking, construction and other vulnerable occupations. At the same time, the ease with which these undocumented migrants have gained passage has cast doubt on America as a nation of enforceable laws.

Using Section 212(f), Mr. Biden can narrow two of the main avenues through which the undocumented enter the country. While some migrants cross the border undetected — some 600,000 in fiscal year 2023 — or overstay visas, a much larger number now claim the right to asylum. In the [Refugee Act of 1980](#), Congress put into law the United Nations convention for granting asylum to migrants who have a "well-founded fear of persecution on account of [their] race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."

Many migrants, seeking a better life for themselves, sidestep the legal path to citizenship through immigration by claiming to be fleeing persecution. Those who ask for asylum are often released pending a court hearing on their claims, which, because of our

overburdened courts, can take an average of four years. About 60 percent of the migrants who finally show up for court dates are denied asylum — a sure sign that the asylum system is being abused. Some don't show up at all.

Through executive orders, Mr. Biden can require that those who seek asylum do so only at ports of entry and can limit those numbers in view of the [backlog](#) of over three million cases. Those who cross at places in between will, if apprehended, be turned back. That would create huge backups, but it would reduce the numbers significantly. Mr. Biden could also repeal his administration's decision in 2021 to greatly [widen](#) the right to asylum to include people who claim to be threatened by domestic and gang violence. That goes well beyond the kind of persecution, epitomized by the Nazi persecution of the Jews, that inspired the United Nations convention and the Refugee Act.

Many undocumented migrants have also been admitted temporarily through [what is called parole](#), which admits migrants “only on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons” or for “significant public benefit.” It was conceived in the 1952 law for admitting, for instance, people who needed extended medical care. But Mr. Biden applied it whole hog to classes, groups and nationalities. These included Afghans, Cubans, Haitians, Venezuelans and Ukrainians. Over 300,000 migrants were admitted in fiscal year 2023.

A case can certainly be made for the president to raise the refugee cap to admit Afghans who aided the United States in a losing war and face retribution or to Ukrainians seeking temporary refuge from Russia's invasion. But under Mr. Biden's expanded use of parole, it is being used to admit people — many of whom are economic migrants — from countries whose regimes the United States simply disapproves of. Mr. Biden can abandon this use of parole without any action from Congress.

He can also continue building the border wall that the Trump administration began (something the administration [restarted](#) in late 2023). Doing that won't stem the current flow of the undocumented because it could take [up to 10 years](#) for the wall to be completed. But it would eventually discourage some illegal immigration, as the wall on the California border did decades ago.

All that said, to fully address the challenge posed by illegal immigration — to address the incentives for coming to the United States in the first place as well as the ability of our system to process those seeking legitimate asylum and remove those who have broken the law — will take a comprehensive effort by Congress. Even under the executive orders described above, illegal border crossings and visa overstays would continue, America's ports of entry would become madhouses, and America's undocumented would remain in a fiscal and labor limbo.

Congress could adopt three kinds of measures — and I will say at the onset that unfortunately, it is unlikely that these measures will pass. First, a national requirement, backed up by harsh penalties, that employers verify the legality of prospective hires through an anti-counterfeit “e-verify” system run by Social Security and the Department of Homeland Security. A version of this was originally proposed in 1981 by a

congressional commission chaired by Theodore Hesburgh, the Notre Dame president and civil rights leader, and it was in the H.R. 2 bill that passed the House last May. It would significantly reduce the attraction illegal immigration has held for economic migrants.

Second, strengthen border protection along the lines proposed by the Senate bipartisan bill. That would include H.R. 2's [proposal](#) to raise the criteria for establishing an initial claim of asylum from there being a "significant possibility" that a court would accept the claim to it being "more likely than not" that it would. Increase funding for asylum officers, immigration judges, and border agents, as the Senate bill proposed. And — what was not in the Senate proposal — work with Central American countries to shut down the smuggling business.

Third, grant undocumented workers and their families, who hold jobs and have lived respectfully in the United States, a path to legal employment and residence, as was suggested in comprehensive immigration bills in 2006, 2007 and 2013.

These three initiatives need to be enacted together. If Congress simply granted the undocumented a path to employment and legal residence, as some Democrats advocate, it would spur more illegal immigration, as amnesty under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act might have done. If Congress were to pass employee verification and border protection without granting a path to employment, as H.R. 2 proposes, that could plunge the undocumented into the labor black market and even the criminal underworld. The three measures together would go a long way toward eliminating the undocumented underclass.

America could once again boast of being a nation of laws. Employers in the service sector would have to raise wages to attract workers who now have to depend on social programs and tax subsidies to avoid poverty. And if the country needed more immigrants than it was getting through its current laws, it could do so by raising the annual limits on legal migration.

Realistically, for the near term, these congressional proposals come out of bills that have already been rejected or tabled. That leaves the onus of doing something squarely on the Biden administration, which will do itself and the country a favor by acting even if it can do so only in a limited fashion.

The A.I. Economy Makes Our Humanity More Important Than Ever

Aneesh Raman and Maria Flynn *New York Times* Feb. 14, 2024

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There have been just a handful of moments over the centuries when we have experienced a huge shift in the skills our economy values most. We are entering one such moment now. Technical and data skills that have been highly sought after for decades appear to be among the most exposed to advances in artificial intelligence. But other skills, particularly the people skills that we have long undervalued as “soft,” will very likely remain the most durable. That is a hopeful sign that A.I. could usher in a world of work that is anchored more, not less, around human ability.

A moment like this compels us to think differently about how we are training our workers, especially the heavy premium we have placed on skills like coding and data analysis that continue to reshape the fields of higher education and worker training. The early signals of what A.I. can do should compel us to think differently about ourselves as a species. Our abilities to effectively communicate, develop empathy and think critically have allowed humans to collaborate, innovate and adapt for millenniums. Those skills are ones we all possess and can improve, yet they have never been properly valued in our economy or prioritized in our education and training. That needs to change.

In today’s knowledge economy, many students are focused on gaining technical skills because those skills are seen as the most competitive when it comes to getting a good job. And for good reason. For decades, we have viewed those jobs as “future-proof” given the growth of technology companies and the fact that engineering majors [land the highest-paying jobs](#).

The number of students seeking four-year degrees in computer science and information technology shot up [41 percent](#) between the spring of 2018 and the spring of 2023, while the number of humanities majors plummeted. Workers who didn’t go to college and those who needed additional skills and wanted to take advantage of a lucrative job boom flocked to dozens of coding boot camps and online technical programs.

Now comes the realization of the power of generative A.I., with its vast capabilities in skills like writing, programming and translation (Microsoft, which owns LinkedIn, is a major investor in the technology). LinkedIn researchers recently looked at which skills any given job requires and then identified [over 500](#) likely to be affected by generative A.I. technologies. They then estimated that [96 percent](#) of a software engineer’s current skills — mainly proficiency in programming languages — can eventually be replicated by A.I. Skills associated with jobs like [legal associates](#) and [finance officers](#) will also be highly exposed.

In fact, given the broad impact A.I. is set to have, it is quite likely to affect all of our work to some degree or another.

We believe there will be engineers in the future, but they will most likely spend less time coding and more time on tasks like collaboration and communication. We also believe that there will be new categories of jobs that emerge as a result of A.I.'s capabilities — just like we've seen in [past moments](#) of technological advancement — and that those jobs will probably be anchored increasingly around people skills.

Circling around this research is the big question emerging across so many conversations about A.I. and work, namely: What are our core capabilities as humans?

If we answer that question from a place of fear about what's left for people in the age of A.I., we can end up conceding a diminished view of human capability. Instead, it's critical for us all to start from a place that imagines what's possible for humans in the age of A.I. When you do that, you find yourself focusing quickly on people skills that allow us to collaborate and innovate in ways technology can amplify but never replace. And you find yourself — whatever the role or career stage you're in — with agency to better manage this moment of historic change.

Communication is already the [most in-demand skill](#) across jobs on LinkedIn today. Even [experts in A.I.](#) are observing that the skills we need to work well with A.I. systems, such as prompting, are similar to the skills we need to communicate and reason effectively with other people.

Over [70 percent of executives](#) at LinkedIn last year said soft skills were more important to their organizations than highly technical A.I. skills. And a recent Jobs for the Future [survey](#) found that 78 percent of the 10 top-employing occupations classify uniquely human skills and tasks as “important” or “very important.” These are skills like building interpersonal relationships, negotiating between parties and guiding and motivating teams.

Now is the time for leaders, across sectors, to develop new ways for students to learn that are more directly, and more dynamically, tied to where our economy is going, not where it has been. Critically, that involves bringing the same level of rigor to training around people skills that we have brought to technical skills.

Colleges and universities have a critical role to play. Over the past few decades, we have seen a prioritization of science and engineering, often at the expense of the humanities. That calibration will need to be reconsidered.

Those not pursuing a four-year degree should look for those training providers that have long emphasized people skills and are invested in social capital development.

Employers will need to be educators, not just around A.I. tools but also on people skills and people-to-people collaboration. Major employers like [Walmart](#) and [American Airlines](#) are already exploring ways to put A.I. in the hands of employees so they can

spend less time on routine tasks and more time on personal engagement with customers.

Ultimately, for our society, this comes down to whether we believe in the potential of humans with as much conviction as we believe in the potential of A.I. If we do, it is entirely possible to build a world of work that is not only more human but is also a place where all people are valued for the unique skills they have, enabling us to deliver new levels of human achievement across so many areas that affect all of our lives, from health care to transportation to education. Along the way, we could meaningfully increase equity in our economy, in part by addressing the persistent gender gap that exists when we undervalue skills that women bring to work [at a higher percentage than men.](#)

Almost anticipating this exact moment a few years ago, Minouche Shafik, who is now the president of Columbia University, said: “In the past, jobs were about muscles. Now they’re about brains, but in the future, they’ll be about the heart.”

The knowledge economy that we have lived in for decades emerged out of a goods economy that we lived in for millenniums, fueled by agriculture and manufacturing. Today, the knowledge economy is giving way to a relationship economy, where people skills and social abilities are going to become even more core to success than ever before. That possibility is not just cause for new thinking when it comes to work force training. It is also cause for greater imagination when it comes to what is possible for us as humans, not simply as individuals and organizations but as a species.