EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

Is your state ready for the genomic era? *Harnessing Genetics to Prevent Disease & Improve Health* offers guidance in charting a course for genetics and public policy.

For today’s state policymaker, genetics is a new, uncharted frontier. While states grapple with tough decisions (health programs, homeland security, and budget constraints), genetic services are entering the market. For this reason, a policy framework needs to be put in place in the near term that protects the privacy and confidentiality of genetic information, ensures appropriate use of genetic services and technologies, and encourages the integration of genetics in health, social, and environmental policy.

Many states have begun responding to the policy issues associated with the findings of the Human Genome Project and genetics research. However, until now, there has been limited policy guidance on what state policymakers can do to capture the benefits of genetics to advance individual and collective health.

*Harnessing Genetics* will help you and your staff discover policy gaps, assess new opportunities, and develop policies that address the social, legal, and ethical implications of genetics for your state. By adapting these guidelines, you can assure consumers are protected and encourage the application of genetics to prevent disease and improve health.

Recommended Health Policies

To prepare for the emerging genetics market, state policymakers should:

- Support public education programs that increase consumer knowledge of genetics.
- Work with federal policymakers to strengthen the public health infrastructure for genetics.
- Review licensing requirements for all health professionals, adding genetics competencies as needed.
- Offer incentives to increase the supply of qualified genetic counselors and improve the genetic counseling skills of other health professionals.
- Tap existing prevention measures known to improve health.
- Develop a genetics research agenda in collaboration with state universities and health agencies.

Other recommended policy actions include:

- Assure state policies protect individual privacy while providing for the information needs of public health tracking systems and qualified health researchers.
- Authorize one state agency to handle reports of discrimination or privacy breaches involving genetic information.
- Direct state universities to expand genetics education and training for health professionals.
- Convene insurers, employers that sponsor coverage, consumer groups, and health professionals to resolve barriers that will impede the timely availability of affordable and beneficial genetic services.
- Require that genetic services financed by the state meet standards for validity, utility, and reliability.
- Establish a coordination process to achieve a consistent, coherent approach to integrating genetics into policy and programs.

To assist in this critical decision making process, state policymakers should ask grantmakers to help prepare the ground for a new era. *Harnessing Genetics* highlights the many ways private philanthropies and public funding agencies can contribute to the policy process.