About one in three deaths related to heart disease – the No. 1 leading cause of death in the U.S. – are preventable, and more than 91,000 heart disease deaths could be prevented each year, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

High blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease, and effectively managing blood pressure would help prevent deaths associated with the disease. Nearly 17,000 additional deaths could be prevented in deaths related to stroke, the No. 4 leading cause of death in the U.S., the CDC reported.

May is High Blood Pressure Education Month, an appropriate time for physicians to focus on how they can prevent deaths related to high blood pressure. To start, physicians can ensure their practice staff is accurately measuring blood pressure. Risk-factor reduction, early intervention and successful treatment are required to reduce the number of preventable deaths related to heart disease, the CDC report said.

The AMA’s Improving Health Outcomes initiative is incorporating the CDC’s recommendations. Clinic sites in Maryland and Illinois are part of a pilot program to implement principles of safe design into the
ambulatory setting, ultimately improving outcomes around hypertension. The AMA is collaborating with researchers at John Hopkins Medicine and the pilot sites to develop and test a set of evidence-based recommendations for physicians to incorporate into their practices or community health centers.

In addition, the AMA is using elements of a program called Project ReD CHiP at Johns Hopkins’ Center to Eliminate Cardiovascular Health Disparities to design resources that will help practices engage patients in better self-management, particularly at the community level. The CDC report noted the importance of determining risk factors at the state and local level.

“The majority of these risk factors do not occur randomly in populations; they are closely aligned with social, demographic, environmental, economic and geographical attributes of the neighborhoods in which people live and work,” the report said. “If health disparities were eliminated .... all states should be closer to achieving the lowest possible death rates for the five leading causes of death.”

The report also called out type 2 diabetes as a major cause of diseases of the heart and stroke, another issue the AMA is addressing through promoting screening, prevention and clinic-community linkages.