Congenital heart defects (CHDs) are the most common type of birth defects in the United States, affecting nearly 1% of births per year. These defects are the leading cause of infant mortality.

Join the Academy Feb. 7-14 in raising awareness of CHD prevention and improved outcomes for affected children and adults. Treatment and care have improved dramatically in the past decade, leading to better survival and function over the lifespan. Yet, people with CHDs at all ages still face many medical, social and personal challenges.

The Academy — a founding member of the Congenital Heart Public Health Consortium (CHPHC) — and the National Birth Defects Prevention Network are spreading a public health message that congenital heart defects sometimes can be prevented. Prevention strategies include reducing known risk factors before and during early pregnancy as the heart forms. Mothers should take recommended doses of folic acid; avoid alcohol, smoking and street drugs; manage weight and diabetes; and talk to a doctor about other strategies to prevent birth defects. Secondary prevention involves optimizing management and reducing complications for people with congenital heart defects.