



# The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills

*David Stuckler, Sanjay Basu*

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Politicians have talked endlessly about the seismic economic and social impacts of the recent financial crisis, but many continue to ignore its disastrous effects on human health—and have even exacerbated them, by adopting harsh austerity measures and cutting key social programs at a time when constituents need them most. The result, as pioneering public health experts David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu reveal in this provocative book, is that many countries have turned their recessions into veritable epidemics, ruining or extinguishing thousands of lives in a misguided attempt to balance budgets and shore up financial markets. Yet sound alternative policies could instead help improve economies and protect public health at the same time.

In *The Body Economic*, Stuckler and Basu mine data from around the globe and throughout history to show how government policy becomes a matter of life and death during financial crises. In a series of historical case studies stretching from 1930s America, to Russia and Indonesia in the 1990s, to present-day Greece, Britain, Spain, and the U.S., Stuckler and Basu reveal that governmental mismanagement of financial strife has resulted in a grim array of human tragedies, from suicides to HIV infections. Yet people can and do stay healthy, and even get healthier, during downturns. During the Great Depression, U.S. deaths actually plummeted, and today Iceland, Norway, and Japan are happier and healthier than ever, proof that public wellbeing need not be sacrificed for fiscal health.

Full of shocking and counterintuitive revelations and bold policy recommendations, *The Body Economic* offers an alternative to austerity—one that will prevent widespread suffering, both now and in the future.

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