

Good morning Ranking Member Whitehouse, Senator xx, and Senator yy, thank you for the opportunity to join you for this spotlight hearing.

I work on climate, air pollution and health at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an advocacy organization committed to protecting the planet and its inhabitants. I am also a former EPA scientist. Behind the headlines on climate disasters happening across the country, there's a largely invisible story about the ways in which climate chaos is making us sicker as a nation. The deaths, illnesses, and injuries linked to climate change are a costly and growing economic problem that we must address.

The climate science is crystal clear that carbon and methane pollution are fueling stronger wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and heatwaves. While the health consequences of these climate-linked disasters are large and growing, they're not as obvious. That's because costly suffering is often hidden from public view, as Americans seek medical care in urgent care clinics, emergency rooms, and hospitals. These days, climate change-worsened disasters routinely injure and kill people across our country, and that terrible suffering is not only a public health problem, but also an economic one.

Over the past nine years, I've led research to uncover the hidden health costs of air pollution and these climate-linked extreme events. Using public data from federal, state, and local government, my work sheds light on how Americans are increasingly footing the bill for the rising health costs of climate change. Our research shows that these financial costs are not only a future concern, they are already burdening American households - no matter what kind of insurance they have.

At its core, the climate problem is a human health emergency because we all rely on clean air and a safe, stable climate to stay healthy. Fossil fuels are a costly burden on both of these health fronts.

Across the country, burning of coal, oil, and fossil gas generates deadly air pollution that causes people's arteries to harden, deposits carcinogens in their lungs, and damages their brains. These health damages have substantial costs: our research estimates more than \$800 billion in annual health-related damages from death and disease amongst the American population caused by air pollution.

But it's not just air pollution that's causing a heavy economic burden—worsening climate extremes also impose tremendous human costs. Staying safe and healthy is a lot harder to do as heatwaves become more frequent and intense - fueling a rise in cases of heat stroke, wildfires start more easily, with toxic smoke spreading across the country - causing lung cancer and other respiratory distress, stronger hurricanes supercharged by warm ocean water bare down on our coasts, disrupting dialysis care and triggering PTSD and other mental health trauma, and more intense storms and terrible flooding inundate communities - causing drownings, water contamination, and promoting the growth of toxic mold in people's apartments and homes.

A research study I led with other experts in climate, health, and economics showed that a sample of ten climate-linked extreme events across eleven states were linked to \$10 billion in health-related costs each year across the US in just a single year. [Let me repeat that: a sample of ten climate-linked extreme events across eleven states were linked to \$10 billion in health-related costs each year across the US in just a single year.] That staggering medical bill is so large because our work accounted for the societal costs of lost lives, but also enormously expensive hospital and emergency room care, lost wages while people were hospitalized, and costly needs for prescription medications and outpatient care. Our study identified nearly 18,000 emergency room visits, 20,000 hospitalizations, and more than 37,000 outpatient encounters with the healthcare system from just a small sample of climate-related extreme events that hit the country in a single year.

A disproportionate share of the illness-related costs of these extreme events, about two-thirds, were shouldered by people covered under Medicare and Medicaid. That pattern aligns with our understanding that older adults and the economically disadvantaged, our most vulnerable neighbors, are paying dearly as the climate problem intensifies. It also signals that, over time, as climate problems trigger more and more costly treatment in healthcare settings, we're all paying for the rising health costs through higher health insurance premiums in both the public and private sector insurance markets.

These health costs that families are paying for right now, and our research signals tens to hundreds of billions in additional annual expenses in the future if the climate threat continues to intensify. More than half of Americans already report medical financial hardship, meaning they struggle to pay for necessary healthcare. The Trump EPA's actions on climate only make this problem worse, by putting millions of people in further danger from climate hazards.

Given what we know about climate change and costly healthcare treatment, the Trump EPA's radical attack on climate change policy through its repeal of the 2009 Endangerment Finding last month will undoubtedly put further stress on household finances across our country when it comes to health spending.

Overall, it's clear that the Trump Administration's disastrous policy moves on climate change are burdening households with grave health problems and rising medical bills – and the toll is rising. From my perspective as a health scientist, the math is clear: denial and delay on the climate problem is disastrous for the health and economic security of American families.