



NEVADA APPEAL

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Bernice Martin Mathews guest col: Costs of chronic diseases are skyrocketing



Here are some hard, cold facts that should affect how all of us think about the current political season and the decisions we'll make in November. If we do not do something now about the costly chronic disease epidemic, by 2030, medical and productivity losses per person in Nevada will be approximately \$8,400 per year.

And that may even be a conservative estimate of the impact we'll see should more of us become afflicted with cancer, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension or another severe illnesses.

Already, 1.7 million Nevadans have at least one chronic disease, with almost 700,000 coping with multiple chronic conditions. Projecting an even bigger picture, in this same 15-year stretch, these escalating illnesses will cost the state more than \$400 billion.

Yet, despite the magnitude of this issue, we hear less about it in political discussions and debates than we do about where candidates were born

or their latest social media posts. Make no mistake, there are decisions that will be made over the next four years that will greatly influence whether or not we change the course of our society's health and well-being.

Over the next few months, we owe it to ourselves and our loved ones to demand answers on important issues like health care from those who seek high office and will carry our country forward come January.

We need to hear some expanded thoughts, for example, on how candidates plan to improve health and combat chronic diseases. For starters, prevention must become a higher priority. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* showed that Americans are getting recommended preventive care only 60 percent of the time. This needs to change, and it doesn't even touch the people who don't have a regular health care provider.

Likewise, we cannot prevent the rise in diabetes and cardiovascular disease if we don't aggressively take on the obesity epidemic. Candidates need to tell us if they will put political muscle behind proven solutions that reduce tobacco use, improve healthy eating, and encourage physical activity.

We also can't forget the diseases for which we don't have good answers. We need to turbocharge this nation's medical innovation engine. We're seeing the emergence of promising new medicines in the biopharmaceutical pipeline that offer an unprecedented degree of hope to

cancer sufferers and those having facing the threat of Alzheimer's disease, but those aren't coming soon enough for the millions living with Alzheimer's and cancers today.

Candidates need to be asked if they will support policies that enable and incentivize more resources to be focused on research and development of new therapies and cures. Actions that add more regulations or impose government price controls on new treatments have the opposite effect, slowing patients' access to the treatments they need today.

A recent study from research firm IHS Life Sciences found that new medical breakthroughs and adopting healthy behaviors could prevent 1.3 million cases of chronic disease in Nevada over the next 15 years, saving an estimated 163,000 lives in the process.

These projections tell us that we can avoid the costly, painful future that awaits Nevadans if chronic disease escalation continues. Turning things around, though, requires the right public policy decision-making. And that process must be launched with a meaningful health care discussion that has yet to take place among presidential hopefuls.

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