

# LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

NEVADA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

75 CENTS

BREAKING NEWS 24/7 @ REVIEWJOURNAL.COM

\*\*\* a

DECEMBER 12-13, 2015

## Curbing chronic disease a key policy question for presidential candidates

By ANN LYNCH

SPECIAL TO THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL



As one of the early states in the 2016 presidential nomination process, Nevada is in a great position to drive policy messages in this election. Given that early voters have

the power to give candidates critical momentum on the road to the White House, we have both the ability and responsibility to demand specific answers from the candidates on how they would handle the most important issues affecting our lives and futures.

And on one of the most important matters of the day — health care — we're still waiting to hear their solutions.

The nation in general — and Nevada specifically — has a growing chronic disease crisis. Today, more than half of the citizens in our state have at least one chronic illness — heart disease, stroke, cancer, autism or diabetes — and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 28 percent of us have at least two chronic conditions. To make matters worse, data from the research firm IHS Life Sciences tell us that, unless we change course, a decade from now more than 1 million Nevadans will have cardiovascular disease and almost 250,000 of us will be diabetic.

And that's just two of many costly chronic diseases.

With chronic disease being the leading cause of death and disability in our state, and affecting more of us every day, it seems perfectly reasonable to ask the presidential candidates what

each plans to do about it. Thus far, the political dialogue regarding health care has focused on whether to repeal Obamacare or how many more government programs and regulations we need to make being sick cheaper. We've heard next to nothing about how to fight the chronic illnesses that are affecting hundreds of thousands of us and that account for 86 percent of health care spending.

---

*The chronic disease population is arguably the largest segment of voters in the country. The time is now for voters to direct the candidates' attention to the importance of preventing and managing the chronic disease burden affecting every Nevadan.*

---

Republican candidates for president will be in Las Vegas this week for Tuesday's televised debate. There are a few questions they should answer. For example:

— We have a system that, by and large, treats symptoms as they occur instead of focusing on keeping people healthy. How would you change that? How would you improve the incentives in our health care system to encourage insurance

companies, employers and medical professionals to prioritize the prevention, diagnosis and management of chronic diseases?

— How would you use the bully pulpit of the presidency to encourage individuals and communities to pursue and promote healthier lifestyles? More than six of 10 Nevadans are overweight or obese. How would you make population health a priority?

— Obamacare mandated that every American purchase health insurance. But studies show people receive recommended preventive care less than 60 percent of the time. How do we make sure that coverage equals affordable access to appropriate preventive medicine?

— Public and private research drives innovation for better treatments, therapies and cures for diseases. How would you accelerate medical progress, particularly if you support government restrictions on health industry revenues?

These questions concern not only the health of our population, but also our economic well-being. Building wealth depends on having good health, so we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that 86 cents of every health care dollar is spent to treat people with chronic diseases. If we can better treat, manage and prevent these illnesses, health care will be more affordable.

The chronic disease population is arguably the largest segment of voters in the country. The time is now for voters to direct the candidates' attention to the importance of preventing and managing the chronic disease burden affecting every Nevadan.

*Ann Lynch is president of Las Vegas HEALS and co-chair of the Nevada Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease.*