**Guest Column: Candidates must address health concerns in state**

By Julio Fuentes, CEO, Florida State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Even in a state with an economy as large as Florida’s, $3 trillion is no small chunk of change.

That is the cost of growing chronic disease rates in medical costs and lost productivity we’ll bear — a whopping $8,800 a year for each person in Florida over the next 15 years as a result.

It’s one of the major social and economic issues facing our state, but unfortunately, we’re hearing little about it in the current political campaigns.

Cancer, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension — all of these chronic illnesses are on the rise. Today, more than 13 million Floridians have at least one of these diseases and nearly six million of us have more than one.

**IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTION**

Treating these conditions after serious problems develop is extremely expensive.

Preventing and better managing chronic diseases can save us individually and the state overall enormous amounts of money in the long run.

A future of poor health for Floridians and our state’s economy is not inevitable. One might think this is strictly a medical issue, but it’s also a political one.

Our political leaders have important roles to play in reversing current trends and helping more individuals and their families enjoy better health.

They have tremendous power to help us have a health care system that is defined by proactively preventing the development and progression of costly chronic disease.

According to a study by the New England Journal of Medicine, only 6 in 10 of us are receiving recommended preventive care.

This is unacceptable.

Without regular checkups and diagnostic screenings, illnesses like diabetes reach a severely harmful state before being detected.

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Breakthroughs in genomic science are heralding a new wave of game-changing discoveries.

**HEALTHY BEHAVIOR SAVES MONEY**

According to the research firm IHS Life Sciences, adopting healthy behaviors and discovering new, better biopharmaceutical treatments for patients could prevent nearly 12 million cases of chronic disease in Florida over the next 15 years and save more than a million people in Florida alone.

This progress, though, requires policymaking that prioritizes medical advancement.

We need to empower and incentivize both the federal government and private sector innovators to invest in vital research and development.

We also need to face the stark fact that the more we impose government regulations and price controls on medications, the more we slow the pace of essential innovation.

In the coming months, we’re going to be hearing a lot from candidates seeking our votes, particularly with Florida being a major prize in the presidential race and having an open U.S. Senate seat.

To earn our support, political aspirants must give us answers on how they’re going to trim the projected $3 trillion our state will pay in chronic disease costs and give us the opportunity for a healthier tomorrow.

- Julio Fuentes is president and CEO of the Florida State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.
- He is also an executive committee member of the Florida Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease.