

SUPPORT THE STATEWIDE PUBLIC HEALTH AND CLIMATE PROGRAM, HB 104

Sponsored by Representative Reena Szczepanski and Senator Liz Stefanics



The health and well-being of New Mexicans is increasingly at risk because of climate change. We must take immediate action to protect our people and communities from its ever-worsening effects.

THE ISSUE

The health of New Mexicans is increasingly being harmed by climate change, from increasing extreme weather events and drought, to more intense wildfires and more disease-spreading mosquitoes. These hazards impact physical and mental health in many ways, including increased rates of heat stress, spread of infectious diseases, worsening lung and heart disease, and allergies, which can lead to challenges such as financial and food insecurity and a deterioration in overall well-being. New Mexico's children, communities of color, older adults, people with disabilities, and families earning low incomes are most likely to suffer serious, long-term health consequences from these climate impacts.

BY THE NUMBERS

- New Mexico now has an average of **50 more days** of extreme wildfire risk conditions than in 1970.¹ Northern New Mexico has experienced the largest increases in such days nationwide.
- New Mexico saw an **18% increase** in respiratory emergency room visits during the wildfire season.²
- The number of emergency room visits for heat-related illness in New Mexico **more than doubled** between 2009 and 2019³, and likely doubled again between 2019 and 2023.

THE SOLUTION

- Creating a **statewide Public Health and Climate Program** at the Department of Health to build capacity and expertise, support development and implementation of response systems, and improve interagency collaboration.
- Establishing a **Public Health and Climate Resiliency Fund** to assist and enable local and tribal communities to adapt to climate change and respond to public health emergencies from extreme weather events.

These two approaches, combined with meaningful engagement with communities most harmed by climate change, will help improve health outcomes, equity, climate adaptation, and climate resiliency in New Mexico.

Please visit <https://www.nmvoices.org/archives/17278> for a list of the organizations endorsing this legislation.

Endnotes

1. "Fire Weather: Heat, dryness, and wind are driving wildfires in the Western U.S.," Climate Central, Aug. 25, 2021
2. Environmental Public Health Tracking Program, New Mexico Department of Health
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network, accessed 10/21/2022: www.cdc.gov/ephrtracking

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