



United States Senate

March 7, 2023

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

I write to request that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Climate Change and Health Equity examine the impacts of wildfires and wildfire smoke on the United States' health infrastructure and create a plan to address those impacts.

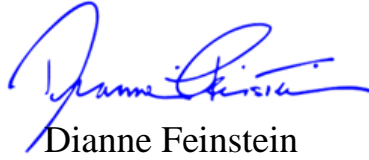
As you know, the annual acreage burned by wildfires in the United States has doubled to 7.4 million acres since the 1990's, exposing more Americans to the detrimental health effects of wildfire smoke. Days with smoky air attributable to wildfires have quadrupled for major cities in California over the past ten years. From 2008 – 2018, wildfires directly caused 178 deaths in California, but preliminary research at UC Los Angeles indicates that wildfire smoke contributed to 11,500 additional deaths over the same time period.

Although the threat from wildfires to our at-risk communities and forests is obvious, the burdens to our health system remain poorly understood, particularly among vulnerable populations. Fortunately, HHS has already funded preliminary work in this area, including HHS-supported studies examining the impacts of wildfire smoke on respiratory hospitalizations and cardiac arrests. Creating a tool for wildfire hospitalizations analogous to the Centers for Disease Control's Heat and Health Tracker would improve community wildfire resilience and increase researchers' understanding of how wildfire smoke is increasing hospitalizations and health care costs.

Thank you for your efforts to date to improve health outcomes amidst the threat of climate change. As the nation prepares for another season of wildfires, I urge you to leverage existing HHS knowledge and capabilities to better understand

the health and economic impacts of wildfire smoke. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dianne Feinstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator