

October 25, 2021

To: United States Senate

We as members of the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), recognize that the climate crisis is a human health emergency. Our concern is evidence-based, stemming from multiple scientific assessments and peer-review studies, all converging on the urgency for action to mitigate climate change. In the past decade we have seen a dramatic rise in climatic extremes due to the buildup of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, particularly methane and carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere, which threaten the health and well-being of our citizens and the world.

As the Congress readies the final Infrastructure and Reconciliation bills, we plead with you to heed the advice of the nation's scientists, doctors and public health officials, all of whom are united in calling for the regulation of the two major pollutants heating the planet.

First, we strongly support a carbon pollution fee on polluting industries that should increase over time and should also be border-adjustable as a signal to all U.S. trading partners; clearly all nations must join us in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Second, we strongly support efforts to impose limits on the emission of methane into the atmosphere by imposing leakage fees on industries that allow the escape of this gas that has a very high atmospheric warming potential.

Third, as health scientists we are opposed to allowing dirty energy operations to be rewarded by solely offsetting emissions of CO₂ (e.g. through carbon capture and sequestration (CCS)); health harming pollutants accompany CO₂ emissions from burning fossil fuels, therefore, strategies narrowly focused on CO₂, can inadvertently have large negative health impacts from unabated release of conventional air pollutants.

Fourth, we urge you provide tax or other incentives for clean energy technology to end fossil fuel subsidies and to promote a fair market in energy technology (fossil fuel subsidies completely skew the market and even represent investments, similar to tobacco, in activities that harm health). The cheapest way to generate electricity today is from renewables and batteries, as the price of solar has dropped 300-fold over the past 40 years. Knowing the health harms of climate change today, to not end these fossil fuel subsidies equates to subsidizing tobacco in the face of scientific evidence on its health harms.

This past year, the President of the NAM, Victor Dzau, announced a multi-year [Grand Challenge on Climate Change and Human Health](#). At this year's annual conference, President Dzau referred to climate change as, "one of the most significant threats to human health in the 21st century."^[1] According to the sixth assessment report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "the science is unequivocal" on the human influence on the Earth's climate and impacts are already being experienced today. The health effects of these GHG emissions have been well documented through the work of many of our members and scientists and scholars around the world: fires in the West, hurricanes in the South, flooding in the eastern states, droughts throughout the world, heat waves of unparalleled intensity and length. These disasters have led to increases in asthma, heat mortality, acute injuries,

starvation, infectious diseases, mental health problems and mass displacement of peoples and the resultant national security and public health threats to our nation.

This is a critical moment with time running out to stabilize the rise in global temperatures below 2°C above pre-industrial levels to avoid catastrophic impacts on our health and well-being. We very much hope the Congress acts swiftly to enact legislation that will promote these urgently needed climate measures that scientifically also equate to public health interventions.

* This letter is written and signed by individual members of the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) and is not an official statement from the NAM.

Sincerely,

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