The Public Health and Community Preparedness Act

New Mexico LHHS Interim Committee, November 28

NEW MEXICO
VOICES
FOR CHILDREN

NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL
PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK

NEW MEXICO
HEALTH
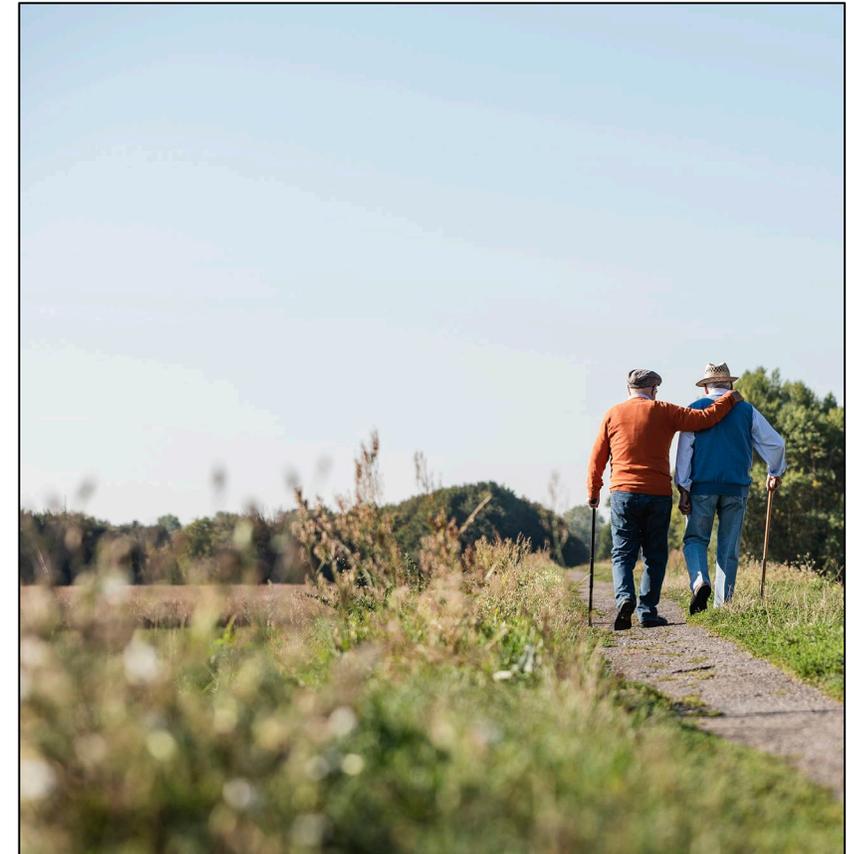PROFESSIONALS
FOR CLIMATE ACTION

The Case for Legislation

- Extreme weather events including heat waves, drought flooding and wildfire are harming New Mexicans' health and are predicted to steadily increase over the next 50 years.

- New Mexico ranks as one of the states most vulnerable to climate change across a variety of social, demographic, and environmental vulnerability measures.

- Communities of color, older adults, young children, people with disabilities and families earning low incomes are most likely to be hurt by these circumstances and most likely to suffer serious, immediate, and long-term health consequences.

The Cost of These Events

- The past 12 months ending in October was the hottest 12-month period that the planet has seen in at least 125,000 years, a new report finds.

- This year in the US there have already been 25 confirmed weather/climate disasters with losses each exceeding over $1 billion. Between 1980–2022, the average was 8.1 events each year.

- In the US, extreme weather cause over $150 billion in direct damages each year. With high confidence, this is projected to increase in the near-term.

- Direct damages include things like property damage, asset losses, insurance premiums, infrastructure repairs, etc.

Source: United States Fifth National Climate Assessment, NOAA

Impacts of Climate Related Events on New Mexicans' Health

- New Mexico now has an average of 50 more days of extreme wildfire risk conditions (hot, dry, windy) than in 1970.

- New Mexico's northern mountain region now has 60 additional days of extreme wildfire risk than in 1970 – the largest regional increase in the U.S.

- More than 1% of the entire state burned in the summer of 2022. The number of acres burned is expected to increase as conditions become even drier and hotter.

- New Mexico saw an 18% increase in respiratory emergency room visits during the wildfire season, compared to previous years.

- Average temperatures in New Mexico have already increased 2 degrees, and are on course to double by 2070, if not sooner, due to the greenhouse gas we have already released into the atmosphere.

- The number of emergency room visits for heat-related illness in New Mexico more than doubled between 2009 and 2019.
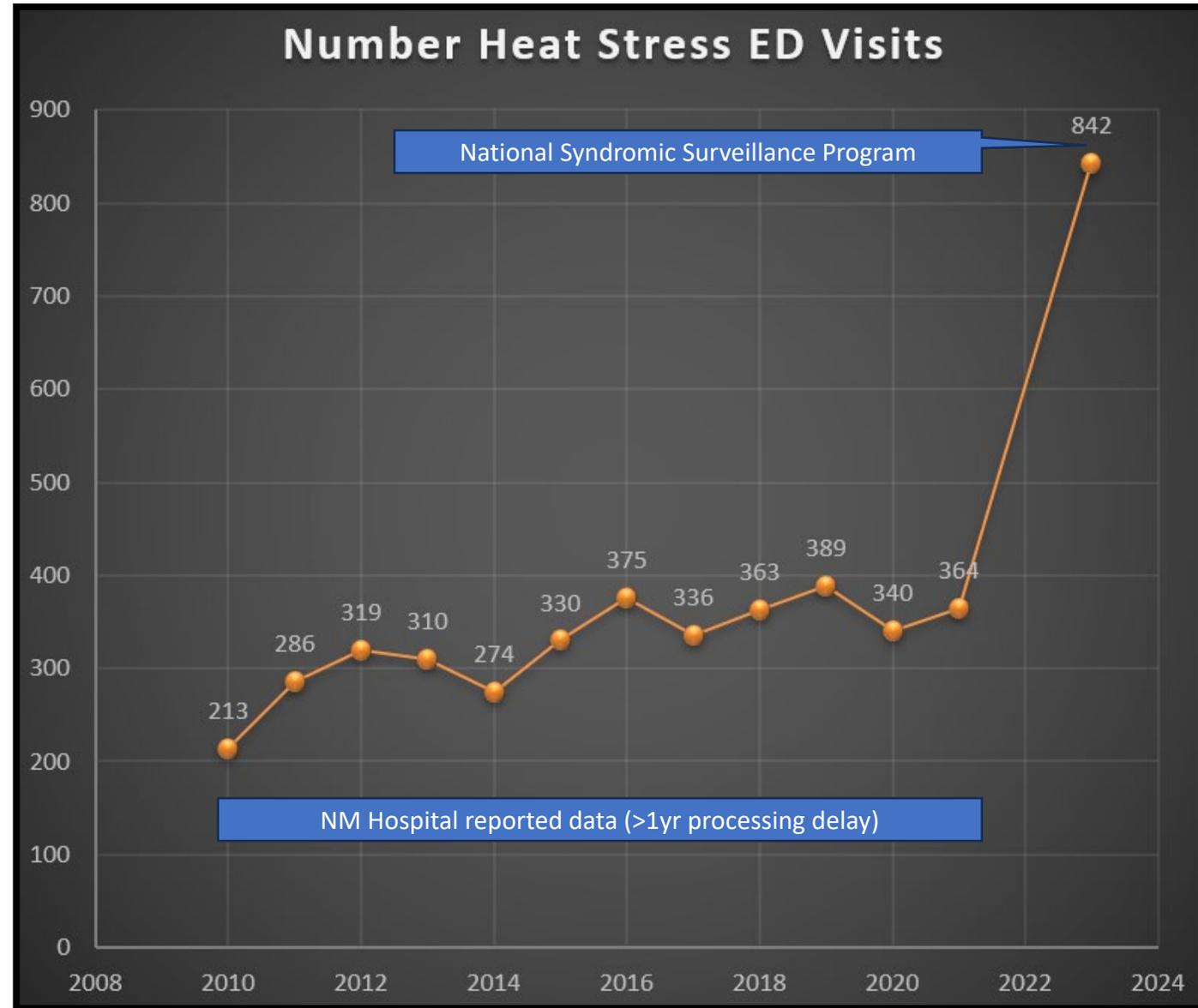
Example -- Heat Impacts in New Mexico

What we are seeing

- Last reported 8/29/23
- Doubling between 2010-2019, then another estimated doubling between 2019-2023.
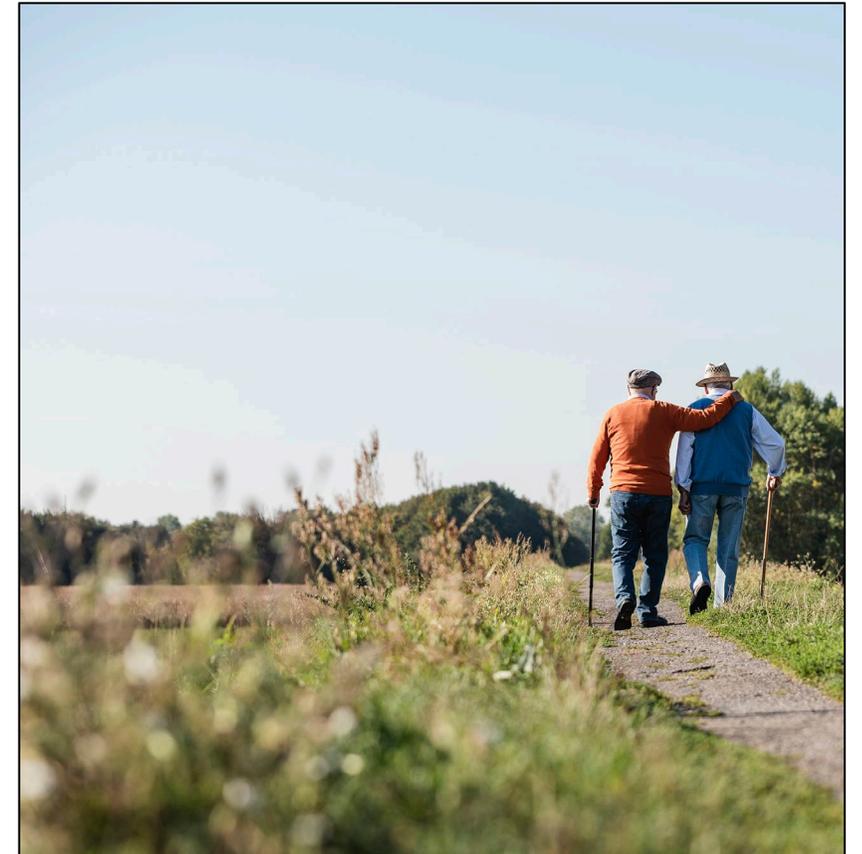- 16% of hospital ED visits were not reported

What we are not seeing

- Federally funded hospitals (IHS, VA) ED admissions
- Heat worsened pre-existing conditions.
  - Estimated to account for 30-50x more heat-associated fatalities.

New Mexico Environmental Public Health Tracking. National Syndromic Surveillance Program. NMDOH Weekly Heat Related Illness Report combined with NM-Tracking - Query Result - - Heat Stress ED Visit Counts. Accessed 11/1/2023

The Public Health and Community Preparedness Act

- Create a Climate and Public Health Program at the New Mexico Department of Health to provide the capacity necessary to support this important work and help improve interagency collaboration focused on health equity, climate mitigation, and adaptation in New Mexico.

- Establish a Public Health and Climate Resiliency Fund to assist local communities in preparing for and responding to public health emergencies related to climate change and extreme weather, as determined by county and tribal emergency managers and/or health councils.

- Support local communities in accessing additional climate adaptation funds
  - Expertise
  - Grant support ($10 million fund for local communities)
  - Matching funds
  - Growing federal dollars

Examples of Community and Tribal Grants

Funding for Preparedness Measures, such as:

- Face masks and indoor air purifiers during wildfire events.

- Establishment of community centers with backup power in case of blackouts, especially during extreme weather.

- Safe drinking water after wildfire contamination of watersheds.

- Support elderly and disabled residents clear fire-risk brush near their homes

- Resources to develop community plans for wildfire evacuations and identify wildfire refuge areas.

- Access to consumer-grade air quality sensors to inform individual and community decisions.