



The Daily Dish

And Now For Something Really Depressing

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Eakinomics: And Now For Something Really Depressing

Pandemic and recession got you down? A bit hot about the West Coast burning up? Can't shake the gloom of tropical depressions, tropical storms, and hurricanes in the Gulf? Exhausted from being on the lookout for locusts and frogs? Relax. 2020's horror show will pass in the end, and AAF's Tara O'Neill Hayes and Serena Gillian have helpfully [highlighted](#) a health and economic crisis that is even worse and shows no sign of abating: America's chronic disease crisis.

First, a definition: "A disease is considered chronic when it persists for at least a year and requires ongoing medical attention or limits daily activities." Second, some brief documentation of the prevalence of chronic disease: "Approximately 45 percent of the U.S. population, 133 million Americans, suffer from at least one chronic disease. Almost 30 million Americans are living with five or more chronic diseases. The risk and prevalence of chronic disease grows as individuals age. Approximately 27 percent of children in the United States suffer from a chronic condition, while about 6 percent of children have more than one chronic condition. In contrast, around 60 percent of adults suffer from at least one chronic condition, while 42 percent suffer from multiple conditions. Among those 60 or older, at least 80 percent have one chronic illness and 50 percent have two." As the authors point out, the prevalence has been rising over time and appears likely to continue. They also document the fact that there is considerable difference across states and counties in the incidence of chronic disease.

Not surprisingly, treating chronic diseases is expensive. Hayes and Gillian document the direct costs due to chronic diseases – the dollars needed for prescriptions, procedures, and other health care products and services. The authors find that direct health care costs for a patient with chronic disease average \$6,032. This is about five times greater than those without a chronic disease, largely due to more frequent and longer hospitalizations, more frequent emergency room visits, and greater prescription drug use.

But the real kicker is that "including indirect costs associated with lost economic productivity, the total cost of chronic disease in the United States reaches \$3.7 trillion each year, approximately 19.6 percent of the country's gross domestic product."

I can't pretend that "[Chronic Disease in the United States: A Worsening Health and Economic Crisis](#)" is the most uplifting read I've had recently. But it is a compelling reminder of one of the greatest threats to the health and well-being of America's families.