

Climate Conversations

Why the EPA's Reversal of the Endangerment Finding Matters for Public Health and Nursing

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Nurses have long recognized that environmental conditions shape health outcomes. Factors like air quality, heat exposure, housing, and infrastructure all play a role in who becomes ill, who recovers, and which communities are at the greatest risk for health harms. On February 12, 2026, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized a rule reversing its determination that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions endanger public health and welfare (National Archives Federal Register, 2025). This determination, commonly known as the Endangerment Finding, has acted as the primary driver of federal-level climate protections since its creation in 2009. This reversal will have significant impacts when it comes to population health, health equity, and conditions under which care is administered.

The Endangerment Finding originates from the Clean Air Act, which requires the EPA to regulate air pollutants that pose a measurable danger to public health or welfare. In 2009, following extensive research and review of scientific evidence, the EPA concluded that six greenhouse gases meet this standard: carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆) (Environmental Protection Agency, 2025b). The finding established the government's responsibility to protect communities from climate-related harm. The EPA's 2026 reversal asserts that greenhouse gases no longer satisfy the legal definition of "endangerment" (Environmental Protection Agency, 2026, National Archives Federal Register, 2026). This stance substantially weakens the agency's ability to act on climate-related issues, despite the fact that they grow more pressing every year.

The legal foundation supporting the Endangerment Finding is strong and has been used to guide agency action for years. In *Massachusetts v. EPA* (2007), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that greenhouse gases fit the de-

scription of air pollutants under the Clean Air Act, and thus the EPA must regulate them if they are found to endanger public health or welfare (Justia, 2007). Since that 2007 decision, federal courts have repeatedly affirmed the EPA's authority to regulate climate pollution through their judgments. The Endangerment Finding, which was created in accordance with *Massachusetts v. EPA*, followed a meticulous rulemaking process, relied on decades of peer-reviewed research, and withstood numerous legal challenges. For those working to protect public health, the established precedent matters because it reinforces the idea that safeguarding communities from climate-related harm is not discretionary. It is a legal obligation.

Since 2009, the scientific evidence upholding the Endangerment Finding has only grown stronger. Climate change is driven primarily by human-created greenhouse gas emissions, and its effects on human health are well documented. Greenhouse gases lead to rising global temperatures, with higher temperatures increasing rates of heat-related illness and death. Worsening air quality from more intense wildfires exacerbates asthma and other cardiovascular diseases. Extreme weather events contribute to food and water insecurity and place a strain on mental and physical health through displacement, loss, and repeated exposure to disaster (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; Environmental Protection Agency, 2025a). Climate-driven disasters are becoming more frequent, severe, and lead to illness, injury, displacement, and loss of life, all while further burdening the healthcare system. The economic consequences of climate change, including rising health care costs, lost labor productivity, and increased insurance costs and instability all magnify negative health impacts. (Climate Central, n.d.). The rollback of the Endangerment Finding threatens to further slow

progress on reducing climate impacts, even though this matter is more urgent than ever.

Coupled with the repeal of the Endangerment Finding, EPA repealed all standards that regulate GHGs from motor vehicles. Transportation continues to be the largest contributor to GHGs in the U.S., accounting for about 30 percent of the national total (Environmental Protection Agency, 2025a). Pollution from cars and trucks disproportionately impacts communities close to highways and ports. These communities are often low-income and communities of color. These groups face higher exposure to harmful pollutants and elevated risks from climate-driven hazards. This worsens the burden of respiratory disease, cardiovascular harm, and other preventable health conditions, which worsen existing health inequities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

Health professionals, especially nurses, play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Nurses are often on the front lines of responding to climate-related health impacts. Nursing voices are essential in reinforcing three major points: (1) the law supporting climate protections is strong, (2) the science linking greenhouse gas pollution to health harms is clear, and (3) the consequences of climate change are already being felt by communities across the country and will only get worse over time without action.

The [Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments](#) has launched a storytelling campaign featuring nursing voices across the country to emphasize that climate change threatens public health and how rolling back health protections, such as the Endangerment Finding and tailpipe emissions standards, will harm health. The reversal of the Endangerment Finding is a public health issue with direct, measurable impacts on health systems, communities, and the professionals who care for them. Join nurses across the country in

calling for clean air and climate protections. You can share your story by submitting a video or testimonial via this form: <https://bit.ly/40tnDWm>. ■

References

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Members on the Move

Dr. Ellen McCabe and Celia McIntosh, DNP, RN, FNP-C, PHMNP-BC, SCRNP, CEN, CCRN, CNRN, FADLN, FNAP were handpicked by the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) for the Class of 2026 Fellows and will be inducted on June 25, 2026 at the AANP National Conference in Las Vegas, NV, <https://www.aanp.org/news-feed/fellows-of-the-american-association-of-nurse-practitioners-welcome-2026-class-of-fellows>.

Lo-Ruchama Hilaire, BSN, RN and Moselle Jules, BSN, RN received the ANA Early Career Nurse Leader Award, which was created to recognize significant accomplishments and contributions by emerging leaders of the nursing profession.



Cindy Paradiso, PhD, RN-BC, CNE and Celia McIntosh, DNP, RN, FNP-C, PMHNP-BC, SCRNP, CEN, CCRN, CNRN, FADLN, FNAP ran into each other at the National Academies of Practice (NAP) 2026 Annual Meeting and Forum in Indianapolis, IN in March,

where Celia was inducted into the NAP Nursing Academy as a Distinguished Public Policy Fellow.

Jessica Varghese, PhD, RN went to Cuba on a professional research trip with the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE) in March.

J'Adore Larosa-Mattis, DNP, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, FNYAM, FADLN was recognized as one of America's Best in Medicine, <https://americasbestinmedicine.com/connect/j%E2%80%99adore-larosa-mattis>.

Marin Skariah, DNP, MBA, FNP-BC, NEA-BC, IBCLC was named a 2026 Fellow of the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN).

Pamela Ginex, EdD, RN, OCN was selected as one of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE) 2026 Environmental Health Nurse Fellows <https://fellowship.envirn.org/cohort-4/>.

Dewi Brown-DeVeaux, DNP, BS, RN-ONC, FADLN, FAAN received the Estelle Osborne Award from NYU at the Estelle Osborne Legacy Celebration on February 11th. This prestigious award honors the legacy of Estelle Osborne, a visionary educator, administrator, and trailblazer who broke racial barriers in nursing and championed equitable access to high-quality health care.

Ashley Graham-Perel, EdD, RN, NP-BC, MEDSURG-BC, CNE, FADLN, FAAN published her paper titled "After the Applause Ends: Sustaining Equity Priorities in Nursing" in the American Journal of Nursing (AJN) Focus on DEI column in February. She also received the 2026 Dr. Sandra R. Gould Women of Distinction Award from the National Association of Health Services Executives (NAHSE) New York Regional Chapter

Giselle Gerardi, PhD, RN, RNC-OB, C-EFM, Lauren Lodico, BNS, RN, and Josephine Ageyi, BSN, RN were speakers at the 2026 Opportunity & Impact in Nursing Summit in Washington, DC in February.

Billy Rosa, PhD, MBE, APRN, FAANP, FAAN was selected as a 2026 Presidential Leadership Scholar <https://www.presidentialleadershipscholars.org/presidential-leadership-scholars-program-announces-2026-class/>.