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OPINION

For immediate health benefits, New England should accelerate the clean energy transition locally

By getting serious about accelerating emissions reductions, we will see immediate health benefits in communities across the region.

By **Ashish K. Jha** Updated April 28, 2025, 3:00 a.m.



Wind turbines off the coast of Block Island, R.I. in 2017. NYT

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As the Trump administration [downplays climate change and its harms](#), a transformative shift is underway that is reshaping how we use energy and offering extraordinary health benefits. Regardless of what happens in Washington, here in New England we should embrace clean-energy technologies — not only because it's good for the planet, but for the immediate health benefits in our communities.

Last year, renewable energy sources met more than [40 percent of global electricity](#) generation needs. It's a figure driven by record growth in clean energy, particularly solar, which has doubled in output over the past three years and has become the fastest-growing and [least expensive](#) source of electricity on the planet. However, while the world moves rapidly toward clean electricity, a [majority of energy in New England](#) still comes from burning fossil fuels and the region is transitioning slower than states like Texas, which [leads the nation at adding renewable energy and battery capacity](#).

The momentum is clear. While changes in the national landscape since Donald Trump became president are worrisome, what we do here in New England can make a major difference today. By getting serious about accelerating emissions reductions — from power plants, cars, trucks, and buildings — we will see immediate health benefits in communities across New England.

We know that burning fossil fuels — for electricity, heat, and transportation — produces carbon emissions in the atmosphere that pollute the air we breathe today while creating increased risks for the future. [One study](#) found that air pollution from fossil fuels is already responsible for roughly one in five deaths globally. A 2024 report projects that by 2050, climate change will place [immense strain on global health care systems](#), causing \$12.5 trillion in economic losses and 14.5 million deaths. That

New England continues to rely largely on fossil fuels for energy means that we are needlessly harming our health.

Therefore, when New England transitions away from fossil fuels, it would also reduce the health burdens that come with them. That means more children and adults breathing easily, lower rates of asthma and heart disease, and older adults living longer, healthier lives. Data and evidence show this happens right away. When a coal plant in Pittsburgh closed in 2016, researchers documented a significant [decline in cardiac-related emergency room visits](#) in the surrounding community. In California, neighborhoods with higher rates of electric vehicle adoption saw [fewer asthma-related ER visits](#).

The same type of benefits are possible in New England. In Massachusetts, for example, more than [95 percent of air pollution](#) comes from the burning of fossil fuels. According to the [American Lung Association](#), a shift to 100 percent clean electricity and electric vehicles could save Massachusetts \$14.7 billion in health costs, prevent 28,800 asthma attacks, and avoid [1,350 premature deaths](#) over a 30-year period.

It's clear reducing emissions delivers real, tangible health benefits locally. But we are not where we should be. No New England state is in the top [10 of electric vehicle ownership per capita](#), and Massachusetts lags behind states like Arizona, Utah, and Florida in EV ownership. This, too, needs to change.

Transitioning to clean energy can also make local communities more resilient to extreme weather. Heat is now the deadliest weather-related hazard in the United States. It is linked to spikes in [hospitalizations for heart conditions](#), [learning loss in children](#) driven by missed school days during heat waves, and [higher death rates](#). Extreme heat also drives up electricity demand, which can lead to blackouts.

The good news is that clean energy can meet this growing demand while keeping us comfortable and safe.

In Texas, when a heat wave last summer pushed temperatures into the triple digits and shattered [electricity demand records](#), clean energy helped keep the lights — and air conditioners — on. Solar farms hit record numbers during the hottest parts of the day when demand peaked, and grid-scale batteries helped fill the gaps when the sun began to set. Unlike in previous years, when Texans were asked to conserve electricity to avoid blackouts, no such alerts were needed this time. Clean energy actually stabilizes the grid exactly when it is under the greatest stress.

As summer temperatures continue to rise in New England, there will be increased demand for air conditioning in homes, schools, and workplaces. It's now possible to do that without adding pollution to our air by utilizing ultra efficient heat pumps powered by solar or geothermal power either on-site or in the community.

Thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, more Americans can now afford to make their homes, schools, and community spaces more energy efficient. [New rebates and tax credits](#), up to \$14,000, are helping families upgrade to cleaner technologies in their homes and their transportation. Additional incentives also help cover part of the cost of solar panels, efficient windows, and better insulation. These improvements lower utility bills, reduce indoor air pollution, and cut carbon emissions. More needs to be done to ensure these incentives reach low-income families and renters, but results so far are promising.

There is [bipartisan support](#) for maintaining these clean energy tax credits, which shows that despite efforts by the Trump administration to undermine the Inflation Reduction Act, there's still momentum. However, many clean technologies are [already cost competitive over their lifetime](#) without subsidies. That means we need not wait to see what happens in Washington, D.C., to act locally.

In state houses all around New England, lawmakers should be aware that when they support policies and investments that accelerate the switch to clean energy, they are improving the air we breathe today in addition to reducing the long-term risks from

climate change. This has a profound impact on all of us, but it particularly benefits the health of kids and the elderly in our neighborhoods. That is reason enough to avoid the rancor of Washington and lead the energy transition locally.

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