CLIMATE & HEALTH EQUITY FELLOWSHIP
The Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health
National Medical Association

# CHEF Connection

OCTOBER 2026

## Physicians Amplifying the Message

*Advancing Climate & Health Equity on the Stage, in Print, in Policy,*

### CHEF SPOTLIGHT: SPEAKING ENGAGEMENT

SYLVANUS TEBOH, MD
2026 CHEF FELLOW

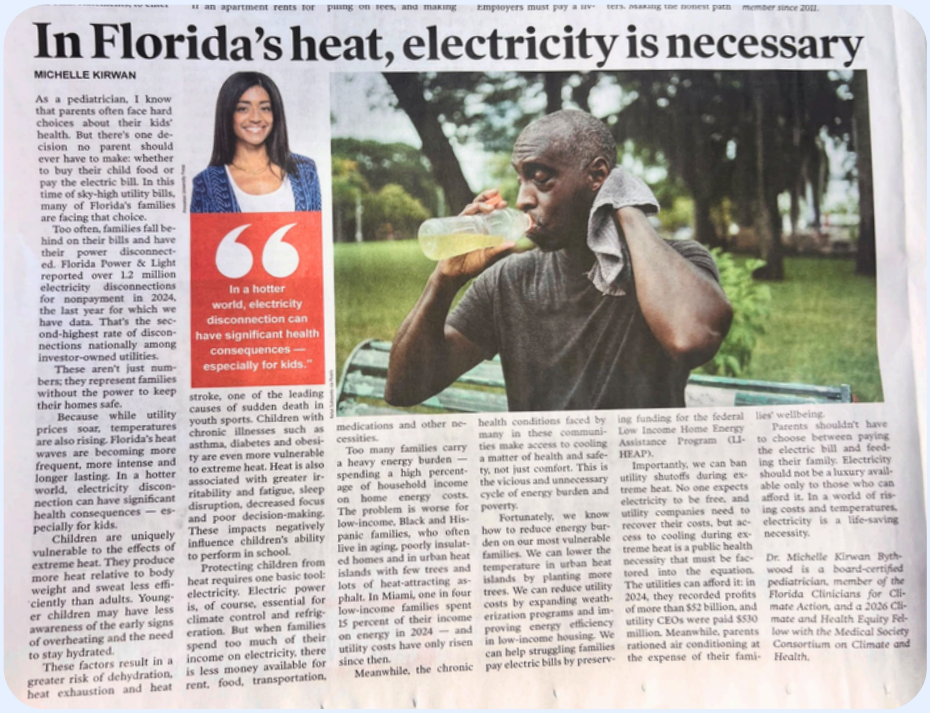
Dr. Sylvanus Teboh, current psychiatry resident in North Dakota, was **featured earlier this year as a speaker** for Safehaven's Wellbeing studio as part of their Digital Circle**. Dr. Teboh discussed mental health, building resilience and climate-related mental health issues.**

### CHEF SPOTLIGHT: OP-ED

MICHELLE KIRWAN, MD
2026 CHEF FELLOW

Dr. Michelle Kirwan, a pediatrician practicing in Florida, **published an op-ed on extreme heat and the necessity of electricity for the health of vulnerable populations.** She specifically identified children with chronic diseases; like asthma and diabetes as having a higher risk for negative outcomes.

*Click the image to read the op-ed*



In Florida's heat, electricity is necessary

MICHELLE KIRWAN

As a pediatrician, I know that parents often face hard choices about their kids' health. But there's one decision no parent should ever have to make: whether to buy their child food or pay the electric bill. In this time of sky-high utility bills, many of Florida's families are facing that choice.

Too often, families fall behind on their bills and have their power disconnected. Florida Power & Light reported over 1.2 million electricity disconnections for nonpayment in 2024, the last year for which we have data. That's the second-highest rate of disconnections nationally among investor-owned utilities.

These aren't just numbers; they represent families without the power to keep their homes safe.

Because while utility prices soar, temperatures are also rising. Florida's heat waves are becoming more frequent, more intense and longer lasting. In a hotter world, electricity disconnection can have significant health consequences — especially for kids.

Children are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat. They produce more heat relative to body weight and sweat less efficiently than adults. Younger children may have less awareness of the early signs of overheating and the need to stay hydrated.

These factors result in a greater risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke, one of the leading causes of sudden death in youth sports. Children with chronic illnesses such as asthma, diabetes and obesity are even more vulnerable to extreme heat. Heat is also associated with greater irritability and fatigue, sleep disruption, decreased focus and poor decision-making. These impacts negatively influence children's ability to perform in school.

Protecting children from heat requires one basic tool: electricity. Electric power is, of course, essential for climate control and refrigeration. But when families spend too much of their income on electricity, there is less money available for rent, food, transportation, medications and other necessities.

Too many families carry a heavy energy burden — spending a high percentage of household income on home energy costs. The problem is worse for low-income, Black and Hispanic families, who often live in aging, poorly insulated homes and in urban heat islands with few trees and lots of heat-attracting asphalt. In Miami, one in four low-income families spent 15 percent of their income on energy in 2024 — and utility costs have only risen since then.

Meanwhile, the chronic health conditions faced by many in these communities make access to cooling a matter of health and safety, not just comfort. This is the vicious and unnecessary cycle of energy burden and poverty.

Fortunately, we know how to reduce energy burden on our most vulnerable families. We can lower the temperature in urban heat islands by planting more trees. We can reduce utility costs by expanding weatherization programs and improving energy efficiency in low-income housing. We can help struggling families pay electric bills by preserving funding for the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Importantly, we can ban utility shutoffs during extreme heat. No one expects electricity to be free, and utility companies need to recover their costs, but access to cooling during extreme heat is a public health necessity that must be factored into the equation. The utilities can afford it: in 2024, they recorded profits of more than $52 billion, and utility CEOs were paid $530 million. Meanwhile, parents rationed air conditioning at the expense of their families' wellbeing.

Parents shouldn't have to choose between paying the electric bill and feeding their family. Electricity should not be a luxury available only to those who can afford it. In a world of rising costs and temperatures, electricity is a life-saving necessity.

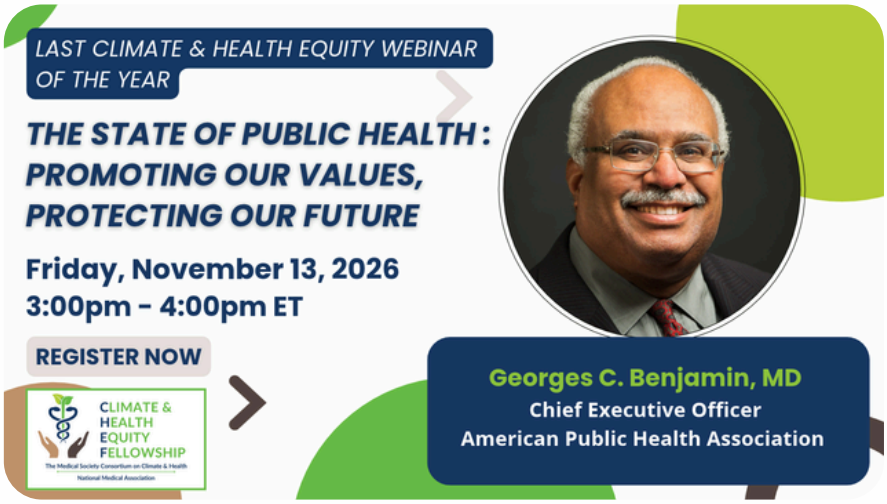
*Dr. Michelle Kirwan Bythwood is a board-certified pediatrician, member of the Florida Clinicians for Climate Action, and a 2026 Climate and Health Equity Fellow with the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health.*

"In a hotter world, electricity disconnection can have significant health consequences — especially for kids."

# CHEF IN ACTION & UPCOMING EVENTS

## CLIMATE & HEALTH EQUITY WEBINAR

*Click the "Register Now" button below*



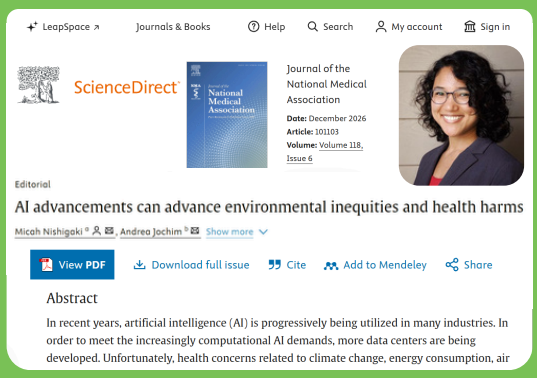

2027 **CLIMATE & HEALTH EQUITY FELLOWSHIP (CHEF)** APPLICATION

The 2027 CHEF Applications are now open. **Click below to learn more and apply:**

**APPLY HERE**

**DEADLINE: DECEMBER 15TH, 2026**

## SPOTLIGHT: CHEF ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT NETWORK (CAEN) WRITING, SPEAKING, AND ADVOCATING




Dr. Micah Nishigaki, 2025 Fellow practicing in Texas, **published a white paper as part of her capstone** warning of the inequitable negative health impacts of AI advancements.

Dr. Shaneeta Johnson, CHEF Director and 2021 CHEF Fellow, will **feature as a presenter with a session on 10/28 titled**, "Environmental Factors Across the Cancer Continuum: Implications for Risk, Treatment, and Recovery", hosted by Yale University. Register here.

Dr. Aisha Harris, 2024 CHEF Fellow and family medicine physician **featured as a lecturer** for Wayne County Medical Society**. Dr. Harris discussed air pollution, health equity, and the impact of the environment on patient care.**

## CLIMATE & HEALTH EQUITY FELLOWSHIP

*2026 Graduation Ceremony*

We invite you to join us for the graduation ceremony for this year's 2026 CHEF class.

**Saturday, December 12, 2026**
**3:00pm - 5:00pm ET**
**Washington, DC**

***Please scan the QR code or click this text to register***

**CHEF Graduation RSVP QR Code**

Over the past six years, we have fostered educational excellence and physician leadership, resulting in over **50 physician advocates** educated in this critical area. They are now advocating for their communities, patients, and necessary policy changes.

**Dr. Mark A. Mitchell Climate and Health Equity Fellowship QR Code**

***Please scan the QR code to donate a one-time or a recurring gift to support the program and futher advance climate & health equity for all***

Climate & Health Equity Fellowship Webpage