

# CONGRESS MUST ENSURE COAL COMPANIES PAY THEIR FAIR SHARE TO PROVIDE BLACK LUNG BENEFITS TO MINERS

## Coal communities are facing an epidemic as black lung disease has risen to historically unprecedented levels<sup>1</sup>

More—and younger—coal miners are being diagnosed with the fatal and incurable black lung disease than ever before. The rate of black lung, an entirely preventable disease caused by exposure to coal dust and silica on the job, has *doubled* in Central Appalachia in just a decade. Recent data shows that 1 in 5 veteran working coal miners in the region now have the disease, compared to 9 to 13% across the region in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

## The Black Lung Disability Trust Fund provides critical benefits to miners and their families

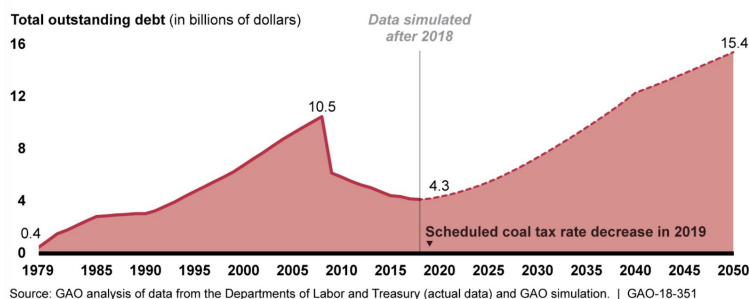
The Black Lung Disability Trust Fund provides monthly payments and medical benefits to coal miners (and surviving dependents) disabled from black lung disease, when their employer is bankrupt or when no coal operator can be identified as responsible for paying benefits. For FY2017, the Department of Labor reported \$184 million paid to more than 25,000 beneficiaries living in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, across all federal Black Lung claims.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Berkes, Howard. "New Studies Confirm a Surge in Coal Miners' Disease." NPR. May 23, 2018. <<https://www.npr.org/2018/05/22/613400710/new-studies-confirm-a-surge-in-coal-miners-disease>>; Berkes, Howard. "NPR Continues to Find Hundreds of Cases of Advanced Black Lung." NPR. July 1, 2017. <<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/07/01/535082619/npr-continues-to-find-hundreds-of-cases-of-advanced-black-lung>>  
<sup>2</sup> NIOSH 2011. Work-Related Lung Disease Surveillance System (eWoRLD). 2011-570 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Respiratory Health Division, Morgantown, WV. <<https://www.cdc.gov/eworld/Data/570>>  
<sup>3</sup> Black Lung Program Statistics. Division of Coal Mine Workers' Compensation, Department of Labor. <<https://www.dol.gov/owcp/dcmwc/statistics/bls2017/DistributionOfClaimsByState2017.htm>>; <<https://www.dol.gov/owcp/dcmwc/statistics/PartCBeneficiaries.htm>>

## Coal company contributions must continue or the Trust Fund's debt will spiral out of control

The Trust Fund is funded by a per ton excise tax on coal mine operators. The current rate of the excise tax is set to be slashed by over half at the end of the year. If Congress lets this happen, the debt of the Trust Fund will skyrocket to over \$15 billion in 30 years according to the Government Accountability Office<sup>4</sup>, putting the benefits of miners in jeopardy. The fund is facing a revenue—not a cost—problem: even if benefits were to be entirely eliminated, the Fund would still be \$6.4 billion in debt. Congress must ensure that coal companies—not taxpayers—fund the program.

Trust Fund Actual and Simulated Outstanding Debt, fiscal years 1979 through 2050



## Excise tax could be used as offset to invest in struggling coal communities with the RECLAIM Act

While every dime of the revenue raised by the tax would go to the Trust Fund, under Congressional budgetary rules extending the tax would also enable Congress to spend a separate pot of existing money on the RECLAIM Act, H.R. 1731, which would create new jobs cleaning up abandoned coal mines.

<sup>4</sup> Government Accountability Office. "Black Lung Benefits Program: Options for Improving Trust Fund Finances." June 4, 2018. <<https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/692103.pdf>>