

September 7, 2020

Dear Members of Congress,

America's Health Organizations Call on Congress to Invest in Protecting and Promoting Health in Response to the Climate Crisis

Our organizations represent physicians, nurses, health and public health professionals and health workers, and hospitals and health care systems. We have dedicated our lives to improving the health of our patients and communities. We are now watching the health impacts of climate change accelerate rapidly here and around the world, with increasing illness and deaths from extreme heat, wildfire smoke, and flooding. The proof that climate change is a health emergency is playing out right now in communities across the nation.

The recent release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report provides definitive scientific evidence that we must act with great urgency to avert irreversible climate change that will be catastrophic to human health and wellbeing. If we fail to act, our children and grandchildren will inherit a world in which health and well-being will be unattainable for many people, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Preventing every fraction of a degree of warming matters for health.

Congressional action is urgently needed to protect the health of the American people from the harmful effects of climate change – now and in the future. Taking the actions necessary to address climate change will help ensure our children's futures; they are also an investment that will improve the health of everyone in our communities almost immediately. We call on you to make smart, healthy, and equitable investments in America that will provide real and substantial health and climate benefits – now and in the decades to come.

America's health leaders implore our elected leaders to meet this pivotal moment with the transformational investments required to protect and promote the health of all in response to the climate crisis. We implore you to prioritize investments, as detailed below, that:

1. Do no harm to the health of people now or in future generations
2. Advance health equity and environmental justice
3. Strengthen health care and public health infrastructure, capacity, and climate resilience
4. Foster a rapid transition to clean, non-combustion renewable energy
5. Promote active and non-polluting forms of transportation
6. Provide parks and greenspace, trees and urban forestry, and green infrastructure
7. Build community resilience to climate change
8. Ensure access to clean and affordable drinking water for all
9. Build healthy and sustainable food and agricultural systems
10. Enable an equitable economic recovery and ensure a just transition to a green economy.

These priority investments in America will pay for themselves many times over in improved health and community well-being and reduced health care costs. These necessary investments provide a crucial way forward to address the climate crisis and related health harms we already witness and to secure our children's and grandchildren's futures.

- 1. Make investments that do no harm:** *Investments must not fund or enable infrastructure and programs that worsen climate change or that harm health and exacerbate health inequities.*
 - Reject investments in new fossil fuel infrastructure: The IPCC and the International Energy Agency have stated that we cannot meet our climate goals if we build new fossil fuel infrastructure.ⁱ Climate change and pollution from fossil fuels are already harming people. We need to stop making the problem worse.
 - Ensure that public investments do not subsidize the use of newer technologies to enhance and enable fossil fuel extraction and generation.ⁱⁱ
 - Ensure that projects funded with public resources meet strong environmental and labor standards and prioritize the use of materials and products with the lowest carbon and toxicity footprints to minimize unintended adverse health consequences.ⁱⁱⁱ

- 2. Make investments that advance health equity and environmental justice:** *Every community and every person in America is at increasing risk from the health impacts of climate change. But climate change disproportionately impacts children, older adults, pregnant people, people with disabilities and communities of color and low-income communities that bear the burdens of systemic racism and historical disinvestment.*
 - Ensure that at least 40% of investments are delivered to disadvantaged communities.
 - Require and support robust community engagement in the allocation of investment dollars.

- 3. Make investments that strengthen health care and public health infrastructure, capacity, and climate resilience:** *We need our health care and public health systems to be fully prepared and able to meet the needs of the American people in the face of the worsening health impacts of climate change.*
 - Establish a core public health infrastructure program to ensure that state, local, tribal and territorial health departments have the tools, workforce and systems in place to address existing and emerging health threats – including climate change – and reduce health inequities.^{iv}
 - Support hospitals and other critical health facilities, including the Veterans Health Systems, Indian Health Service, and other federal health facilities, to plan and prepare for climate-related risks, including provisions to ensure reliable power and water supplies during disasters; prioritize funding for tribal, territorial, safety net and rural hospitals that support the most vulnerable communities.^v
 - Expand home and community-based services to help protect seniors and people with disabilities from the health harms of climate change, while providing opportunities and security for home health workers.^{vi}
 - Include training and career pathways to family-sustaining jobs in health care and public health in a newly established Civilian Climate Corps. Corps participants could play an important role in helping to identify and assist those most vulnerable to climate impacts and can help communities build capacity to protect and promote health in the era of climate change.

- 4. Make investments in clean, non-combustion renewable energy:** *A rapid transition to clean, safe, renewable energy is one of the most important steps we can take to reduce the health threats of catastrophic climate change and reduce the toll of asthma, heart disease, adverse reproductive outcomes, and neurological impacts of air pollution from fossil fuel combustion.*
 - Establish a Clean Electricity Payment Program that targets 100% renewable electricity from pollution-free sources (wind, solar, geothermal, tidal) by 2035.^{vii}
 - Provide long-term tax incentives for clean energy, energy efficiency, and clean transportation, including direct pay options.^{viii}

- Fund programs to support and incentivize decarbonization of the health care sector.^{ix}
- Provide funding to harden and modernize the electric grid, including grid storage, so that the grid is resilient to climate disasters.^x
- Establish a level playing field for clean non-combustion renewable energy by removing direct and indirect fossil fuel subsidies and putting a price on greenhouse gas emissions that reflects true social costs.^{xi,xii}

5. Make investments to substantially increase active and public transportation and other non-polluting forms of transportation: *Transportation is the leading source of carbon pollution, and a major source of water and air pollution that contributes to asthma attacks, lung and heart disease, and adverse reproductive and neurologic outcomes. Shifting from driving to active modes of travel—walking, bicycling, wheeling and public transit—can substantially reduce chronic diseases including obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Streets safe for biking, walking, and wheeling provide opportunities for healthy physical activity and reduce pedestrian and bicyclist injuries. For the millions of Americans who cannot drive or do not own cars, public transit, walking, and biking provide access to the jobs, health care, and essential services critical for health.*

- Improve public transit through funding for capital costs, operational improvement, growth of transit agencies, and addressing the public transit maintenance backlog.^{xiii}
- Fund connected walking, biking and trails infrastructure and programs and policies to make walking, biking, and wheeling safer to reduce pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and fatalities.^{xiv}
- Support the transition of transit and school bus fleets to domestically manufactured zero-emission vehicles.^{xv}
- Build electric vehicle charging infrastructure through grants, rebates, and improved tax credits for 500,000 EV charging stations, ensuring that equitable access is prioritized in planning.^{xvi}
- Fund freight electrification and diesel emissions reductions from ports and freight vehicles and equipment.^{xvii}
- Expand accessible inter-city passenger rail while avoiding additional pollution in hardest-hit communities.^{xviii}
- Promote transportation equity and help reconnect communities that have suffered from community severance due to infrastructure construction.^{xix}

6. Make investments in parks and greenspace, trees and urban forestry, and green infrastructure: *Trees and green space improve air and water quality, dramatically reduce heat exposure, encourage physical activity, and provide benefits to community cohesion and mental health. Over 100 million Americans do not have access to a quality park or greenspace within 10 minutes of their home. These investments are especially important in tree- and park-poor communities, low-income communities, and communities suffering from heat islands.*

- Expand funding for tree canopy and urban forestry^{xx}, parks^{xxi}, green school yards and green infrastructure.

7. Make investments that build community resilience to climate change and ensure that homes, schools, hospitals, and community buildings will provide safe and healthy environments in a rapidly changing climate: *We need to ensure that the buildings in which people spend most of their time are able to protect health in the face of the increasingly frequent and severe extreme heat, extreme weather and flooding, and wildfire smoke events. A GAO report found, for example, that half of all school districts need significant investments to provide adequate heating, ventilation, and cooling for students.^{xxii}*

- Reduce the energy cost burden for low-income households through support for weatherization, energy retrofits, energy efficiency and targeted energy assistance especially in disadvantaged communities, multi-family housing, and low-income households.^{xxiii}
- Support community resilience hubs to protect against the health impacts of climate-related extreme weather such as heat and wildfire smoke events, and to coordinate services and resources after natural hazard events.
- Provide funding for cool and green roofs, cool pavements, and greening to reduce risks from the urban heat island.^{xxiv}

8. Make investments that assure access to clean and affordable drinking water for all, and to ensure that our wastewater and stormwater infrastructure are adequate to meet the rising threats of climate change: *Millions of people lack access to clean, affordable drinking water that is critical for health. Our aging water infrastructure leaves many communities vulnerable to climate-related drought and to flooding and associated infectious disease threats.*^{xxv}

- Assure access to clean and affordable drinking water for everyone and protections for communities vulnerable to drought.^{xxvi}
- Ensure wastewater and stormwater infrastructure adequate to protect from the rising risk of floods and prioritizing the use of green infrastructure.^{xxvii}

9. Build healthy and sustainable food and agricultural systems. *By changing how we grow and harvest our food, we can protect health and significantly reduce carbon emissions. Conservation practices and agricultural resilience are essential to safeguard our food supply in the face of climate impacts.*

- Fund sustainable agro-ecological practices that reduce reliance on environmentally damaging agricultural practices.
- Support research to enable climate resilient and healthy food systems and land management.

10. Make investments that ensure an equitable economic recovery and a just transition to a green economy: *Economic well-being is foundational for health. A sustainable and equitable transition to a carbon-free economy requires shared prosperity and opportunity for all workers and communities and leaves none behind.*

- Ensure that projects built with public resources provide family-sustaining wages and benefits, training and career pathways, and community benefits, and use “Buy America” standards to maximize returns to taxpayers and the American economy; hiring, contracting and procurement policies must benefit low-income communities, people of color, and women.
- Provide funding for education, training, and financial support for dislocated workers and for economic and community revitalization in disadvantaged communities and communities harmed by the energy transition.^{xxviii}
- Support programs that assure that workers and communities do not suffer from the legacy health impacts of fossil fuels:
 - Continue provision of Black Lung Disability Trust Fund benefits to miners disabled by black lung disease and their families.^{xxix}
 - Fully fund the abandoned mine lands program to clean up polluting coal and uranium mines.^{xxx}
 - Plug and reclaim dangerous orphaned oil and gas wells that endanger nearby communities by polluting their air and water.^{xxxi}

Sincerely,

Health Organizations *(listed below)*

- Academic Pediatric Association
- Academy of Integrative Health & Medicine
- Allergy & Asthma Network
- Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Association for Community Psychiatry
- American College of Physicians
- American Lung Association
- American Medical Women Association
- American Psychological Association
- American Public Health Association
- Association for Prevention Teaching and Research
- Association of Academic Physiatrists
- Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
- Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
- Breathe Southern California
- California Chapter, American College of Emergency Physicians
- Center for Climate Change and Health
- Children's Environmental Health Network
- Climate Code Blue
- Climate for Health, ecoAmerica
- Climate Health Now
- College of Urgent Care Medicine
- Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health
- EHIG - Dell Medical School at the University of Texas
- Emphysema Foundation of America
- Endocrine Society
- Eta Sigma Gamma
- George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication
- Georgia Clinicians for Climate Action
- Health Care Without Harm
- Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate
- Human Impact Partners
- International WELL Building Institute
- Maine Medical Association
- Mass General Center for Environment and Health
- Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health
- Medical Society of Delaware
- Medical Students for a Sustainable Future
- MI Air MI Health
- Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action
- Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
- National Association of Social Workers
- National League for Nursing
- National Medical Association
- National Network of Public Health Institutes
- National Student Nurses' Association, Inc.
- North Carolina Clinicians for Climate Action
- Ohio Clinicians for Climate Action
- Pennsylvania Public Health Association
- Physicians for Social Responsibility
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Arizona
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Chesapeake
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Colorado
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Greater Boston
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Iowa
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, New Mexico
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Oregon
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Pennsylvania
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Sacramento
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, San Francisco Bay
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Tennessee
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, Texas
- Public Health - Seattle and King County
- Public Health Institute
- Respiratory Health Association
- Rutgers Global Health Institute
- Society for Disaster Medicine and Public Health, Inc
- Society for Public Health Education
- Society of Behavioral Medicine
- University of Washington Center for Health and the Global Environment (CHanGE)
- Vermont Climate and Health Alliance
- Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action
- W. Montague Cobb Institute
- Wisconsin Health Professionals for Climate Action
- Wisconsin Public Health Association



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Citations

(Note: These citations are only to provide information on estimates of resources that might provide impactful climate and health benefits in various areas; they do not represent endorsement by all of the signing organizations.)

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- ii. Tax incentives for carbon capture and sequestration can allow oil and gas companies to improve drilling and revenue. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/why-green-groups-are-split-on-subsidizing-carbon-capture-technology>
- iii. See example of Buy Clean law: <https://www.dgs.ca.gov/PD/Resources/Page-Content/Procurement-Division-Resources-List-Folder/Buy-Clean-California-Act>; Clean Products Standard: <https://rhg.com/research/cleanproducts-standard-industrial-decarbonization/>
- iv. The *Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act* proposes \$4.5 billion annually. www.congress.gov/bill/117thcongress/senate-bill/674
- v. Hill-Burton Program in HHS Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) proposes \$2 billion/year over five years in the *LIFT America Act*. Health Care Climate Council Infrastructure Letter: [https://noharmuscanada.org/sites/default/files/Infrastructure package recommendations Climate Council 4-29-2021.pdf](https://noharmuscanada.org/sites/default/files/Infrastructure%20package%20recommendations%20Climate%20Council%204-29-2021.pdf)
- vi. Biden's American Jobs Plan proposes \$400 billion for home- and community-based care. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/31/fact-sheet-the-american-jobs-plan/>
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- ix. Health Care Climate Council Infrastructure Letter: <https://noharmuscanada.org/sites/default/files/Infrastructure%20package%20recommendations%20Climate%20Council%2004-29-2021.pdf>
- x. NCSL estimates \$1.5-2 trillion needed for grid modernization. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/energy/modernizingthe-electric-grid-state-role-and-policy-options.aspx>; *Promoting Grid Storage Act of 2019* provides \$1.05 billion over five years for grid storage research and projects <https://casten.house.gov/media/press-releases/casten-smithintroduce-bipartisan-bill-improve-nation-s-energy-storage>
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