



How to Use the Climate Change and Health Action Plan

On April 19, 2016, the *Annals of Internal Medicine* published Climate Change and Health: A Position Paper of the American College of Physicians. The position paper is the result of a Board of Regents-approved resolution passed in 2014 that called on the College to support efforts to address research, education and response to the medical consequences of climate change .

The policy paper maintains that climate change is an individual and public health issue and expresses the College’s concern about the impact that it could have on individual persons and populations in the United States and throughout the world. The College emphasizes that tackling climate change is a “win-win” situation – benefiting not only our planet, but also the health of our patients and community. By addressing climate change, we not only avert environmental catastrophe but also gain public health improvements such as cleaner air and better respiratory health from reduced dirty fuel use and improved cardiovascular health through more active transportation like walking and cycling.

The paper lays out the evidence of how our changing planet has impacted, is impacting and will continue to impact human health. Global warming has not only caused global average temperatures to increase, it has also caused sea levels to rise, land and sea ice to melt, and oceans to acidify. The changing climate has exacerbated drought and intensified extreme storms and other weather events. These climate impacts have consequences for human health in the form of increased risk of heat-related illness, respiratory disease, vector- and water-borne disease, food and water insecurity, and behavioral health problems.

Despite these challenges, physicians can play a substantial role in addressing climate change by taking action to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions in their own practices, advocating for climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, educating themselves about climate change and how it affects public and individual health, and the potential health threats it may pose to their community.

The need for physician action is even more immediate. President Trump and his administration deny the scientific evidence on climate change, support policies to expand use of carbon-emitting fossil fuels, and intend to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, a global accord directing nations to take action to address climate change (1). The administration has moved to reverse other efforts intended to mitigate and adapt to climate change, such as

revoking a regulation on flood risk management, and has erased references to climate change from federal agency websites, including the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (2,3). As the federal government abdicates its responsibility to take action on climate change, physicians must educate their colleagues and communities about the climate change and health connection and advocate for policies in their communities and states to address this problem. Education is incredibly important. Although most people comprehend that climate change is real and a major risk, many see the problem as a remote threat that won't affect them (4). Physicians can play a crucial role in providing objective information to their communities and policymakers that climate change is a danger to human health.

To aid in this important endeavor, ACP has developed a Climate Change and Health Action Plan to help our members take initiative. The Action Plan includes:

- PowerPoint presentation – This can be used for chapter presentations, Grand Rounds, and other educational opportunities. It explains climate change, how it affects health, regional impacts, mitigation and adaptation, and how the health care sector can become more environmentally sustainable.
- Regional Talking Points – These brief U.S.-region specific talking points provide guidance on how to talk about how climate change impacts health in each region of the United States and the co-benefits of taking action.
- Greening the Health Care Sector documents – The health care sector uses a massive amount of energy and is responsible for millions of tons of waste a year. These documents provide guidance on how physicians, their colleagues and staff can take action to curb climate change and make their practices more environmentally sustainable.

The Greening the Health Sector documents include information for small and solo practices and the rest focus on specific target areas like energy efficiency, transportation, and the built environment. These provide a brief explanation of how the health care sector contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and what can be done to curb impact. Each document includes a "case study" and additional resources on the topic. Since some of these interventions would require physicians and others to advocate to their facility's leadership (such as pushing for installation of combined heat and power systems) the documents include links to resources on working with facility leadership and how to engage colleagues to make your practice environment a more efficient, less wasteful, and healthier place.

The action plan can be accessed here: <https://www.acponline.org/climate-change-toolkit>

The following resources provide additional information on climate change:

- Climate Change and Health: A Position Paper of the American College of Physicians. *Annals of Internal Medicine*.
<http://annals.org/article.aspx?articleId=2513976&guestAccessKey=410f1462-e791-4b47-bc2a-799a658c3a01>
- United States Global Change Research Program. The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment.
<https://health2016.globalchange.gov/>
- National Academy of Science and the Royal Society. Climate Change: Evidence and Causes. <http://nas-sites.org/americasclimatechoices/events/a-discussion-on-climate-change-evidence-and-causes/>

¹ The White House. Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord. June 1, 2017. Accessed at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/01/statement-president-trump-paris-climate-accord>

² The White House. Presidential Executive Order on Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure. August 15, 2017. Accessed at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/08/15/presidential-executive-order-establishing-discipline-and-accountability>

³ Lartney J. Another US agency deletes references to climate change on government website. *The Guardian*. August 23, 2017. Accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/23/us-government-agency-climate-change-references-removed-again>

⁴ Leiserowitz A et al. Climate Change in the American Mind: November 2016. Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and George Mason Center for Climate Change Communication. 2017. Accessed at <http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Climate-Change-American-Mind-November-2016.pdf>