



American College of
Preventive Medicine

Climate Change Policy

Policy Recommendation:

The American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM) recognizes climate change as a threat to human health. Therefore, ACPM advocates for public health engagement and action on climate change including adoption and implementation of effective mitigation and adaptation measures. To this end, ACPM supports policies that:

- (1) Prioritize and invest in public health preparedness, surveillance, education and training related to the health impacts of climate change¹
- (2) Invest in public health research on the health effects of climate change to inform mitigation and adaptation strategies²
- (3) Promote the development and availability of educational opportunities for trainees and health professionals addressing the effects of climate change³
- (4) Promote environmentally responsible, energy-efficient health care⁴ and encourage health care providers and health systems to reduce the carbon footprint of the health sector
- (5) Invest in public transportation systems and built environment design and development to mitigate climate change, support adaptation and promote public health⁵
- (6) Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and invest in development and adoption of clean energy alternatives such as the Clean Power Plan, in order to reduce negative health outcomes from climate change⁶
- (7) Commit to and engage in ambitious global action on climate change
ACPM opposes policies that repeal, weaken or undermine laws, regulations and commitments aimed at mitigating climate change.

Key Issues:

1. There is now substantial, undeniable evidence that climate change is occurring.
2. Climate change is primarily a result of human activity.
3. There are numerous threats to public health as a result of climate change.
4. The public health implications of climate change demand action including both mitigation and adaptation measures.

Supporting Evidence:

- 1. There is now substantial, undeniable evidence that climate change has and is occurring.**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has concluded that global warming is “unequivocal,” finding that sea levels have risen, snow and ice has melted and the atmosphere and ocean have warmed over the last three decades.⁷ NASA estimates for 2016 assess the average global temperature increase at 0.99° C.⁸ Models suggest that further reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are needed to avoid exceeding an average temperature increase of more than 2° C over pre-industrial levels.⁹ Avoiding this threshold is considered critical to preventing truly catastrophic and potentially irreversible damage with profound public health implications.¹⁰



2. Climate change is primarily a result of human activity.

There is also overwhelming evidence and scientific consensus that climate change is primarily driven by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.^{11, 12} Thus, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions present an opportunity to mitigate climate change and the associated health sequelae.¹³

3. There are numerous threats to public health as a result of climate change.

There is widespread recognition of the inexorable linkage between health and climate change.¹⁴ In 2012, the World Health Organization estimates that 12.6 million deaths globally were attributable to environmental causes and that number is only estimated to increase in the years to come.¹⁵ The numerous health effects of climate change are manifold^{16, 17} and include but are not limited to:

- Extreme temperature and weather events^{18, 19}
- Poor and worsening air quality^{20, 21}
- Increased burden of infectious diseases^{22, 23}
- Food insecurity and malnutrition²⁴
- Water shortages and diminished water quality²⁵
- Migration²⁶
- Conflict²⁷
- Mental health²⁸
- Social injustice and threats to human rights²⁹

Furthermore, these health effects disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.¹⁶

4. The public health implications of climate change demand action including both mitigation and adaptation measures.

Tackling climate change has been called “the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century” given the significant health co-benefits of low-carbon solutions.³⁰ Addressing climate change entails both ambitious efforts to mitigate global warming through reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as well as efforts to adapt to climate change.³¹ It is in this context that preventive medicine health professionals support and will lead efforts to tackle climate change and protect human health.^{32, 33, 34}



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