

# Ideas for Action on Renewable Energy Standards

The [RES policy brief](#) builds upon recommendations within the [U.S. Call to Action on Climate, Health and Equity: A Policy Action Agenda](#), which identifies policy priorities that advance climate solutions with health and equity benefits. Renewable energy standards are an important component of that effort. The brief can help health professionals understand and engage on improving standards, whether in their city, state, or nationally. This guide provides some recommended ways and ideas to take action on one of the most impactful climate policies that is relevant in every state, and has an opportunity to advance at the federal level.

**Below are some suggested ideas and tips for how medical professionals can engage and utilize the brief.**

## Key Messages

**Utilize this messaging on social media, in op-eds, or in discussion with advocates and policymakers:**

- Generating electricity from fossil fuels produces 1/4 of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions and emits other pollutants that cause significant health harms, which disproportionately impact communities of color and low-income communities.
- Pollution from fossil fuels causes and aggravates conditions such as asthma, lung cancer, heart disease, respiratory infections, stroke, and neurological disease, and leads to adverse pregnancy outcomes and impacts to children’s cognitive development. In 2014, a study estimated that air pollution from electricity generation led to 14,000 premature deaths – disproportionately harming communities of color.
- Renewable energy standards – often called Renewable Portfolio Standards – are important in hastening the transition from fossil fuels to renewable and non-polluting energy sources, slowing climate change and bringing immediate health benefits to communities.
- A 2019 study found that existing renewable energy standards in just ten states would create \$4.7 billion in health benefits by 2030 solely by decreasing particulate matter pollution; doubling the standards in those states would increase health benefits to \$20 billion over the same ten-year period.
- Renewable energy standards can differ substantially in their composition, and thus can have varying benefits on climate and health. Key components of a strong RES include: clear definitions of renewable energy that exclude fossil fuels; mandatory and enforceable targets; ambitious targets and timeline; and prioritization of benefits to frontline and low-income communities and to workers.



**Remember:** if you are acting on behalf of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, expressing support for proposed legislation is likely considered lobbying. Review [legal guidelines](#) before taking any action.

## Action at the Local and State Level

The most effective avenue for education and advocacy on RES is often at the local and state levels. Local policies are critical – a 2018 study estimated that [half of the growth](#) in U.S. renewable energy generation in the last two decades can be attributed to state renewable energy requirements.

- Coalitions are often the strongest means of building support for an issue or legislation. Your voice, experience, and knowledge as health professionals can add a critical but often missing dimension to discussions about renewable energy policy – how it affects people. One of the best ways to get started is to

identify organizations or coalitions that are working on climate and energy policy in your state or region, and talk to them to see if their approach and values align with your own.

- Share the brief with allied organizations and offer your support and expertise. Ask what you and your colleagues might do to be most helpful in an on-going campaign. Or, if no groups are working on an RES, ask if there might be interest in doing so together.
- Learn more about the status of RES in your area, by talking to environmental and environmental justice organizations, renewable energy industry associations, or using the web. The RES brief can help you explore the components of an existing or proposed RES. Remember that in many states, RES are called Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS).
  - Does your state already have an RES? Use *this resource*.
  - Are there proposals on the table to put an RES in place if there is not one, or to strengthen an existing RES? Utilize *this policy database*.
  - Has your governor, mayor, or county board released a goal that could be expanded or codified into state law? See *a map of community commitments here*.
- If you find opportunities to advance RES policy – ideally in coalition with others – dig deeper into the details of existing or proposed RES policy so that you can think through how effective it may be in benefiting health in your area.
  - Review information about the health benefits of RES and share with your coalition partners.
  - Talk to coalition partners or local public health agencies, or look for data online, to understand local health concerns – for example are there concerns about high asthma rates in certain areas near industrial facilities or freeways?
  - Seek out any experts or academics in your region who can help you better understand the energy policy landscape, or local/state health and health inequities patterns that might be related to air pollution.
  - Identify whether electrical utilities are complying with standards and are on-track to reach the goals. *Some utilities resist targets and continue to build additional fossil fuel infrastructure – public pressure or testimony at regulatory hearings can help ensure progress.*
  - Assess the equity and environmental justice efforts of utilities and consider asking for improvements. Utilize *this helpful guide* to determine the equity components of a policy.
- Reach out to bill’s authors, cosponsors, or interested allies to share health-related research regarding the impacts of fossil fuels and the health benefits of renewable energy.
  - Consider requesting a meeting to discuss the health impacts and benefits related to energy – include a clear and concise “ask,” if you’re able to. For example, “would you be interested in making a floor speech or press release about this topic?”
- Write an op-ed or LTE about the benefits of clean, safe, and healthy renewable energy, why it’s important in your community, and the policy change you seek to achieve these benefits. For example, if your region suffers from coal-burning power plants, talk about the specific health impacts, and the short-term benefits of switching to a renewable energy source for which your state has great potential to expand.
  - Determine the communities that are most harmed by fossil fuels in your state:
    - *It’s common that the most polluting facilities are located in communities of color or low-income communities (see RES brief). These may not just be power plants, but also refineries, mining operations, or pipelines.*
    - Highlight any efforts these communities are already engaged in.
  - Consider including the economic benefits from increased renewable energy deployment:

- Include data on the growth of [solar industry employment](#) and [clean energy jobs](#) in your state.
  - Educate your members about the topic and state of energy policy:
    - Send the RES brief or key points, and any of the above information you believe is most important.
    - Consider including a petition or action items that they can take to strengthen their state or community renewable energy goals.
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## Action at the Federal Level

The federal government has not yet enacted a national clean energy standard, but informing your elected officials with health data and research is important. The Biden-Harris campaign has [pledged a goal](#) of carbon-neutral electricity generation by 2035, intending to build upon the best practices of state standards. While executive orders and rule changes can help, a national standard would have to be passed by Congress.

- Contact your federal representatives' offices to inform them about the health harms of fossil fuels and the health benefits of renewable energy.
  - *One-pagers of condensed and localized information are valuable. Mention health benefits, potential employment, polluting facilities in the district/state, etc.*
- Educate your members about potential renewable energy progress at the federal level so that they are better prepared to respond if opportunities arise.
- Publicly share your support for national action on a renewable energy transition, whether calling for executive or congressional action broadly (*avoid mentioning specific legislation*).
  - Share and express support for the energy-related [executive actions](#) that a Biden-Harris administration can take to advance renewable energy. *Supporting executive orders, especially before they are sworn-in, is not likely considered lobbying.*
  - Express your support for climate action and renewable energy to your legislators, highlighting the renewed opportunities for bipartisan progress. Consider mentioning the other policies included in the RES brief.

**Please reach out with any additional questions**

**Colin at [team@ms2ch.org](mailto:team@ms2ch.org)**