

## Updated Message Guidance for Health Professionals on Advocating for Rapid Adoption of Equitable Climate Solutions

### We are Delivering Our Message in A New Context

This update of our message guidance to health professionals is based on the changing communication environment that has emerged over the past year. We now have many more opportunities to use our voices to advocate for equitable climate solutions. Here are a few of the most noteworthy developments:

At the national level, the new Administration has created a sea change in national opportunities to advocate for progress on climate policies that protect health and safety through equitable climate solutions:

- It committed to and began to implement a “whole-of-government” approach to climate change, including creating an [Office of Climate Change and Health Equity](#).
- It has reversed numerous policies of the previous Administration, including rejoining the Paris Accord.
- It signed into law the \$1 trillion [Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill](#) which includes significant climate provisions; and it gained support from many in Congress for the climate provisions of the even larger Build Back Better legislation package.

Over the same period, there was a significant upswing in activity in regions, states, cities, counties, and towns which created more chances for health professionals to raise their voices, in the public square and directly to public officials.

While all of this is cause for increased optimism, we would be remiss in not mentioning that the evolving communication context includes a constant drumbeat of new scientific reports documenting the scope and urgency of the growing threat and shrinking timeline for avoiding the dire impacts that climate change portends. At the same time, we are facing an ever-more-determined effort by those who oppose climate action to pollute the communication environment with obfuscations, empty promises and proffered solutions that won't work.

### Our Guidance is Supported by Communication Research

The headline from polling research conducted by the Center for Climate Change Communication (Mason 4C) over the past few years, which has tracked American's views on climate change since 2008, is that public opinion has moved rapidly toward greater awareness and concern about climate change and that support for policies to address climate change is at its highest since this polling began.<sup>1</sup> A majority of the public now understands that the health harms of climate change will become more common.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to polling, Mason 4C has conducted research studies that reinforced how trusted and powerful the voice of health professionals can be in creating public support for climate action and how best to message effectively.<sup>1,3</sup> **This messages guidance is not meant for rote repetition, but to allow health professionals to create a narrative for garnering public support for action that is personally and locally relevant to both the health professional and the audience.**

**The intended audience for this guidance is the lay public.** We have a separate message guidance, that is intended to support health professionals' when directly communicating with public officials titled [Encouraging Public Officials to Lead on Climate and Health](#).

## Message 1: Establish Who You Are and Your Values

As health professionals, we all care deeply about the health and safety of our families, our patients, and our community, and we all work hard to ensure their health & safety.

### Supporting Points:

- Our calling is to help people stay healthy and treat them when they get ill.
- One of the most important ways we can help keep people healthy and safe is to make sure they have a clean, safe community in which to live and work.
- When our patients and communities experience threats to their health and safety, we believe it is our responsibility to speak out and advocate for effective responses.

## Message 2: Establish the Challenge of Climate Change to Health

**Climate change is already harming our health, and, without rapid and concerted action, many more lives will be lost or harmed**, especially those who are already most vulnerable. We are seeing the health harms of climate change in our practices and in our communities.

### Supporting Points: *(NOTE: Tailor supporting points to your specialty, your practice and/or your experience in your community.)*

- **Poor Air Quality.** Climate change worsens air quality by increasing smog, smoke from more wildfires, pollen, and mold from higher humidity and flooding. This can lead to more lung infections, asthma and allergy attacks, bronchitis, chest pains, and even death.
- **Food-borne disease.** Climate change is causing higher water temperatures, heavier downpours, and more flooding that can spread bacteria, viruses, and parasites from animal and human feces into fields where food is growing. People who eat contaminated food can suffer from diarrhea, vomiting, and in severe cases, paralysis, organ failure, and death.
- **Extreme Weather.** Climate change is causing increases in the frequency and severity of some extreme weather events such as major storms, floods, and droughts, which can lead to injury, displacement, reduced availability of safe food and water, and can make it harder to get medical care by damaging roads, bridges, and power lines.
- **Water-Borne Disease.** Climate change is causing higher water temperatures, heavier downpours, and more flooding that can spread bacteria, viruses, and parasites from animal and human feces into waterways. People who drink or swim in the contaminated water can suffer from diarrhea, vomiting, and in severe cases, paralysis, organ failure, and death.
- **Vector-borne disease.** Climate change is increasing temperatures and changing rainfall in ways that increase the geographic range of disease-carrying mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, and rodents that can spread harmful illnesses like Lyme disease, West Nile virus, Dengue fever, Malaria, and Zika virus.
- **Hunger and Malnutrition.** The level of carbon dioxide in our air is increasing, and the resulting climate change is increasing temperatures, heavy rainfall, and flooding. More carbon dioxide in the air decreases the nutritional value of food by causing plants to produce less protein, more starch and sugar, and take in fewer essential minerals.
- **Mental Health.** Climate change is causing increases in extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and major storms. Many people exposed to the worst of these events experience severe stress and serious mental health effects including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and increases in suicidal thoughts. Beyond the mental health harms from experiencing extreme weather events, people who are experiencing or learning about other health harms of climate change also experience mental stress.
- **Extreme Heat.** Climate change is causing more dangerously hot days, greater humidity, and longer, hotter, more frequent heat waves, which can lead to heat-related illness and death from heat stroke and dehydration, and/or worsen some chronic diseases.

### Message 3: Establish Who is Harmed First and Worst

**3a.** We are all vulnerable to the harms of climate change, but some of us are more vulnerable than others, due to:

- **Biological factors** (e.g., our age, gender, or pre-existing health conditions);
- **Economic forces** (e.g., where we live and work, or how much we earn); or
- **Social and structural forces** (e.g., the impacts of policies rooted in unequal investment and purposeful divestment in communities of color—referred to as systemic racism—or in rural areas or other places that are home to people with low incomes).

**3b.** The groups of people who are being harmed first and worst include babies and children, pregnant people, older adults, people with disabilities, people with certain chronic health conditions (heart disease, lung disease, obesity), people in low-income communities, communities of color, and people who work outdoors.

**Key Resource:** [Medical Alert! Climate Change is Harming Our Health](#) <sup>4</sup>

### Message 4: Establish the Health Benefits of Climate Action

There are many actions we can take that will not only be good for our climate but will also make us, and our communities, healthier and safer, almost immediately.

**Supporting Points:** *(Note: Tailor supporting points to your own patients, community and experience.)*

- **Producing Clean Electricity.** Producing electricity from clean sources, such as solar and wind power, will give us cleaner air and water and reduce the pollution that causes climate change.
- **Greening Communities/Cities.** Improving the design of our communities by adding trees and parks and making it easier and safer to get around on foot, bike and mass transit will help people become more physically active and reduce the pollution that causes climate change.
- **Cleaner Transportation.** Increasing the use of public and shared transportation, increasing fuel efficiency, switching to “low-/no-emissions vehicles” and encouraging and supporting active transportation (e.g., walking and cycling) will reduce air pollution and help us be more active.
- **Healthier Homes and Buildings.** Designing, building, and retrofitting homes and commercial buildings will reduce emissions and improve health by reducing exposure to indoor and outdoor air pollution.
- **Food and Food Systems.** Encouraging plant-forward diets, adopting climate-smart agricultural practices, and reducing food loss and food waste will reduce emissions and improve health by increasing access to healthier and safer foods.

**NOTE:** *When messaging on health benefits, emphasize that they will be experienced locally and rapidly.*

- Just as we are experiencing the health harms of climate change here and now, if we take these actions, we can experience the health benefits of climate solutions rapidly and locally. Communities that take action to fight climate change will help solve a global, long-term problem, but they will also be rewarded with almost immediate local improvements in health.

### Message 5: Establish the Need for Equity in Climate Solutions

We must ensure that everyone benefits from climate solutions. Those who are most at risk from the health harms of climate change (due to biological factors, economic forces, or social and structural forces, including systemic racism), must fully and fairly experience the health benefits of climate solutions.

**Key Resource:** [The Medical Promise of Climate Solutions: The Faster We Go, the Healthier We'll Be](#) <sup>5</sup>

## Message 6: Deliver our Summary Message on Climate and Health

Climate change and health have a common enemy, heat-trapping pollution. Taking immediate and concerted action is a win-win: a win for climate and a win for health.

### Supporting Point:

- In addition, a win for health, by saving health costs, will be a win for the economy.

## Message 7. Define the Opposition

With all these reasons to take action to protect our health, we're not going fast enough. The reason for this is clear. For too long, fossil fuel company CEOs, their lobbyists, and the politicians they have in their pockets have stood in the way of our efforts to clean up air, our water and create a better future. They've put money and power ahead of our health and safety.

### Supporting Points:

- They've spread lies, hid information, and peddled "solutions" they know won't work.
- They've allowed our air and water to become polluted, allowed toxins to be dumped into our communities and reaped profits while leaving us and our children to bear the burden of sickness and suffering from the problems they created.

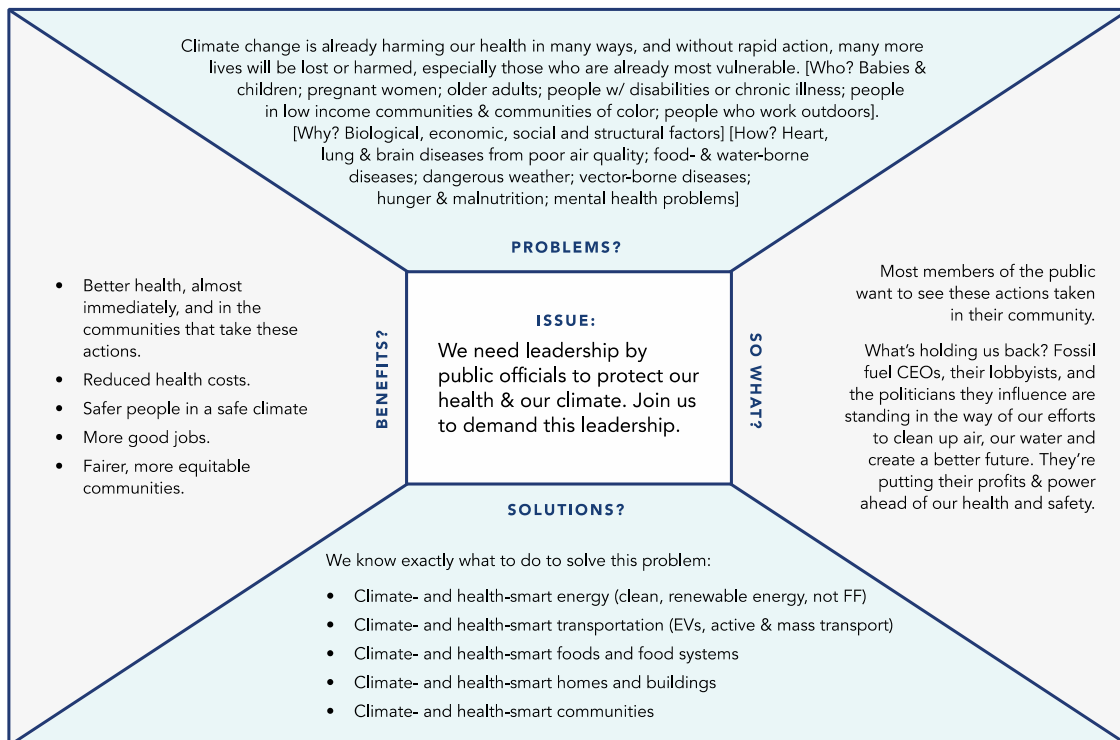
## Message 8. Make the Ask

People can't solve climate on their own. We need policies that will protect our health and safety. Many people agree and are demanding that public officials act on climate. This is why we ask you to \_\_\_\_\_.

## The Message Box

Audience: The public

**REMEMBER:** Start by establishing you're a health professional, and what health professionals value.



**REMEMBER:** Our health & our climate have a common enemy: heat-trapping pollution. Let's put an end to it, forever. Doing so will be good for our health, our climate, and our economy.

COMPASS

## Citations

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- <sup>1</sup> Kotcher, J., Maibach, E., Montoro, M., & Hassol, S. J. (2018). How Americans respond to information about global warming's health impacts: evidence from a national survey experiment. *GeoHealth*, 2(9), 262-275. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2018GH000154>
- <sup>2</sup> Kotcher, J., Maibach, E., & Choi, W. T. (2019). Fossil fuels are harming our brains: identifying key messages about the health effects of air pollution from fossil fuels. *BMC public health*, 19(1), 1-12. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31455278/>
- <sup>3</sup> Maibach, E., Miller, J., Armstrong, F., El Omrani, O., Zhang, Y., Philpott, N., ... & Jensen, G. K. (2021). Health professionals, the Paris agreement, and the fierce urgency of now. *The Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 1, 100002. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S266727822030002X>
- <sup>4</sup> Medical Alert! Climate Change is Harming our Health.(2017) [https://medsocietiesforclimatehealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/gmu\\_medical\\_alert\\_updated\\_082417.pdf](https://medsocietiesforclimatehealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/gmu_medical_alert_updated_082417.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> The Medical Promise of Climate Solutions: The Faster We Go, the Healthier We'll Be. (2022) <https://medsocietiesforclimatehealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Medical-Promise-of-Climate-Solutions-.pdf>