

Key Messages and Guidance

This updated message guidance reflects recent messaging research. It is focused on the benefits we see when we talk more explicitly about fossil fuels—and best practices to do so effectively.

As you review this guidance, there were two key findings that are critical for health professionals:

- 1.** When health professionals name fossil fuel CEOs and some politicians as an enemy, it doesn't carry reputational harm or threaten to erode trust. In fact, **audiences trusted health voices more when they named opponents to progress.**
- 2.** This approach, which does not name any political party, actually helps to **depoliticize the issue of climate change.** These messages work across parties—and can help to close the gap in views about climate change between more conservative and liberal audiences.

THE BIG STORY

Sample Narrative

This is a model of how the recommended messages that follow can come together into short introductory remarks.

“We all want to live in safe, healthy, stable communities, but as a [doctor/nurse/ etc.], I know that fossil fuel pollution is harming our health and causing climate change. That threatens our communities and our health. We are seeing more smog and air pollution, stronger storms and hotter days. Fortunately, we've also seen that a clean energy future, with cleaner air and water and healthier people, is possible. There is widespread and growing support for this transition, and we've seen communities all around the country making it a reality. However, Big Oil companies and their lobbyists are undermining progress by deceiving the public. We need to act together to overcome the campaigns and misinformation of Big Oil companies if we want to improve the health of people and the climate.”

BEST PRACTICES

When talking about the health harms from fossil fuel pollution, it is most effective to talk about the impacts on children and babies and to name specific impacts, such as delays in development, reduced IQ, attention deficits, learning difficulties, behavioral problems and autism in babies and children.

What the Research Shows: The research found this was the most effective approach for increasing concern in audiences. Also successful, though slightly less so, was talking about children and older adults or talking about children and more generally about challenges to “learning and thriving.”

This was true for people of all ages.

Whenever possible, localize and personalize your messages by talking about what’s happening where your audience lives and what you’ve seen and experienced firsthand.

What the Research Shows: Research shows that specific health harms and specific solutions generally resonate more with audiences. Identify and be ready to share specific examples as you communicate.

WHAT’S NEW?

These messages clearly name fossil fuels as the source of dangerous air pollution that harms our health. They then name fossil fuel pollution as the largest cause of climate change.

What the Research Shows: Research shows that talking about the health impacts of fossil fuel pollution is one of the most effective arguments to increase concern among all segments of the public—more so than talking about the climate impacts.

These messages clearly name fossil fuel CEOs, lobbyists and **some** politicians as the obstacle or villain of this story.

What the Research Shows: A recent experiment tested if it was more effective to name fossil fuel companies, some politicians or both (or neither) as the barrier to progress. Across political parties, this approach of naming both performed the best. This experiment avoided naming politicians of a specific party to avoid activating defensive views among conservatives and was explicit that it was just some politicians to provide a sense that voting is critical.

MESSAGES

Shared Aspiration Message

We all want safe, healthy and stable communities.

Expanded Message: As a health professional, I want to make sure that my patients, friends, family and neighbors are healthy and thriving. We all need clean air and water and we can achieve that by moving quickly toward cleaner, more reliable and affordable energy and moving as quickly as possible to stop using polluting fossil fuels.

Messaging Insight: We want to lead communications about climate change and health with a positive vision for what we are trying to achieve that establishes common ground with our audience. The “challenge message” will explain how climate change threatens this aspiration.

Challenge Message

Fossil fuel pollution and climate change harm the health of our people.

Expanded Message: We’re seeing more and more threats to our health because of fossil fuel pollution and the climate change it’s causing. We’re seeing more smog and pollution, more wildfires and smoke traveling hundreds of miles, worsening storms and heat waves, longer pollen seasons and more contaminated flood waters harming communities. These occurrences lead to more lung and heart disease, harm the brain development of children, force people from their homes and cause early deaths.

These harms are felt the most by babies and children, pregnant individuals, older adults, those with health conditions, people with lower incomes and communities of color. The fossil fuel industry is putting profits ahead of health and spending millions to make false claims that they are part of the solution.

Messaging Insight: We want to lead with pollution from fossil fuels and then quickly connect it to climate change. We can then increase the urgency of this challenge by naming how it is harming health and that it will get worse if we don’t act. This helps us frame the issue and explain why health professionals are weighing in, but want to move to solutions as quickly as possible.

Solution Message

We can act to improve the health of people and the climate together and we can counter Big Oil's deception by demanding real solutions.

Expanded Message: If we act now, we can make our communities and families healthier and safer, have cleaner air and water and build a clean energy future. Millions of people like us are working to make that happen by contacting their mayors, governors and members of Congress to demand real action on air pollution and climate change. We need leaders who will take real action, like pushing for a rapid transition to clean energy.

We can beat the fossil fuel CEOs and lobbyists, and the politicians who are in their pockets, whose lies and misinformation stand in the way of our efforts to build a better future by cleaning up our energy, air and water.

Messaging Insight: We want to emphasize action at the local, state and federal levels to avoid frustration with inaction at the federal level. Once we build enthusiasm for solutions, we can call out Big Oil as a major obstacle to progress. When we talk about the companies (rather than their products) we should talk about "Big Oil" or "Big Oil CEOs." When possible, talk about specific solutions that have immediate health benefits where they are adopted and help address climate change.

Hope Message

We know rapidly adopting these solutions is possible because there is widespread and growing support, and we see action already happening.

Expanded Message: People across the U.S. overwhelmingly support climate action that reduces fossil fuel pollution, improves our health and gives us cleaner air and water. Public support for climate action has grown rapidly over the past several years and Congress passed the most significant piece of climate legislation in history, the Inflation Reduction Act. Electric vehicle sales have soared and renewable energy sources are now cheaper and producing more of our electricity than ever before. We can build on this momentum.

Messaging Insight: We want to establish an understanding that this work is widely supported and has already started in many places.

SUPPORTING MESSAGES

Supporting Challenge Messages:

- Fossil fuel CEOs, lobbyists and some politicians have put their thirst for money and power ahead of our health and safety: They hide crucial information, spread lies about the problem and peddle “solutions” they know won’t work—while they pollute our air and water and dump toxins into our communities, leaving us and our children to bear the burden of sickness and suffering from the problems they created.
- 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 such as Lyme disease, West Nile virus, Dengue fever, malaria and Zika virus

Supporting Challenge Messages about Inequities:

- Communities that are home to people with lower incomes and people of color are less likely to have the resources to prepare for and respond to climate change and its harms. These communities are often subject to policies and practices by government and businesses that expose them to more pollution and conditions that make them more vulnerable to climate change.
- For example, many communities that are home to people of color and those with lower incomes have less green space and fewer trees, which improve air quality and protect against heat. They are more likely to live in areas with higher amounts of concrete and asphalt that make these neighborhoods measurably hotter.
- A person’s age, health status or where they work, learn and live can result in worse health harms from climate change. For example, hotter days, climate pollution, smog and other climate impacts put people who are pregnant and their babies at higher risk of premature birth and low birth weight, and can cause problems with an infant’s brain development.

Supporting Messages on Solutions:

- Our work to improve health and address climate change must be designed to serve those with the greatest needs and who have been exposed to the greatest harms from fossil fuel pollution and climate change.
- Investing to make buildings more energy-efficient and climate-friendly through electrification reduces utility bills and emissions and improves health by reducing the air pollution we breathe indoors and outdoors.
- Increasing fuel efficiency, switching to low- and no-emissions vehicles, encouraging the use of public and shared transportation and supporting active transportation like walking and cycling will reduce air pollution and help us be healthier.
- Planting trees and increasing green space, such as public parks, make it easier and safer to be more physically active while improving our air quality by reducing the pollution that causes climate change.

Supporting Messages on Hope:

- The public understands climate change to be a health emergency and wants leaders to respond. [More than six in 10 voters](#) think developing clean energy should be a high or very high priority for the federal government.
- We’ve [made progress](#) where renewable energy sources like wind and solar now produce more of our national electricity than nuclear power and nearly as much as coal power. We’re moving in the right direction already and we need to move even more quickly.
- Support for solutions only grows as people begin to experience the immediate health benefits in their community and realize that supporting rapid change to clean energy is about trading up to a healthier, safer and more prosperous future for everyone.