

This guide provides recommended core messages, a sample narrative showing how these messages come together, insights into communicating about this work broadly and some deeper supporting messages.

THE BIG STORY

A 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. 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.”

OUR CORE MESSAGES

These boil down our messages to the core concepts we want to communicate. The following pages have guidance on how to expand on these messages.

Shared Aspiration Message	We all want safe, healthy and stable communities.
Challenge Message	Fossil fuel pollution and climate change harm the health of people across the United States.
Solution Message	We can improve the health of people and the climate at the same time if we counter Big Oil’s deception by demanding a transition from oil, coal and gas to renewable energy in our communities, states and beyond.
Momentum Message	We know rapidly adopting these solutions is possible because there is widespread and growing support. States and local communities are leading the way.
Urgency Message	See below for guidance on tailoring this message
Call to Action/Ask Message	See below for guidance on tailoring this message

BEST PRACTICES

Talk about the harmful impacts on children and babies.

Name specific risks, 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.

Talk about fossil fuels. 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

Whenever possible, localize and personalize your messages. Talk about what’s happening where your audience lives and what you — and they — have seen and experienced firsthand.

Always tailor your message to your audience based on what they know and believe about climate change.

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.

Name who is responsible. 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 2023 experiment found that when health professionals name “fossil fuel CEOs and some politicians” as an enemy, it doesn’t harm their reputation or erode trust. In fact, audiences trusted health voices more when they named opponents to progress.

This approach does not name any political party and actually helps to depoliticize the issue of climate change. These messages work across parties.

MESSAGES

Shared Aspiration Message

We all want safe, healthy and stable communities.

Supporting Messages:

- As a health professional, I want to make sure that my patients, friends, family and neighbors are healthy and thriving. Clean air and water are a cornerstone of health.

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 people across the United States.

Supporting Messages:

- Climate change is the greatest force shaping the health and life of the generation of children born today.
- Every part of the country is seeing more threats to our health because of fossil fuel pollution and the climate change it's causing. Our health is threatened by more smog and pollution, worsening wildfires, extreme weather events, hurricanes and heat waves.
- Extreme weather events, heat and air pollution are all fueled by fossil fuels and climate change and lead to more lung, brain and heart disease, harm the brain development of children, force people from their homes and cause early deaths.
- We all experience these threats to our health, but some people face a greater burden, including babies and children, pregnant women, older adults, people with health conditions, people with lower incomes and communities of color.

Messaging Insight: We want to lead with pollution from fossil fuels and then 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 make clear why health professionals are weighing in. Move quickly to solutions rather than spending too much time right away on the health harms.

Solution Message

We can improve the health of people and the climate at the same time if we counter Big Oil's deception by demanding a transition from oil, coal and gas to renewable energy in our communities, states and beyond.

Supporting Messages:

- We need everyone who cares about health to join health professionals in demanding local, state, business and national leaders to continue the move to affordable, cleaner, renewable energy as quickly as possible.
- Moving to reduce the use of polluting fossil fuels today will make our communities and families healthier and safer. It's simple: cleaner air and water lead to healthier people.
- Working together, 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 and state first to avoid feelings of hopelessness 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 and climate benefits where they are adopted.

Momentum Message

We know rapidly adopting these solutions is possible because there is widespread and growing support. States and local communities are leading the way.

Supporting Messages:

- People across the U.S. overwhelmingly support climate action that reduces fossil fuel pollution, improves our health and gives us cleaner air and water. Headlines about action on the federal level may feel overwhelming, but three in five voters think developing clean energy should be a high or very high priority today.
- Seven out of 10 voters support tax credits and rebates for electric appliances and [40 million Americans](#) say they want their next car to be electric. We can build on this momentum.
- 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.

Messaging Insight: We want to establish an understanding that this work is widely supported and has already started in many places. We want to counter strong narratives of hopelessness about climate action.

Guidance on Tailoring Your Urgency and Call to Action/Ask Messages

You should be prepared with two additional messages:

Urgency Message

The “Urgency Message” is one that makes clear — even when it’s obvious to us as messengers — why this work is urgent today. When possible, draw on something recent and memorable that your audience has witnessed — ideally personally.

Call to Action Message

The “Call to Action Message” or “Ask” is one that tells your audience how they can be part of the solution. This should be:

- **Specific:** Overly broad or vague calls to action can leave people feeling disempowered or lost. What specific action can they take? Does it feel like it will have an impact?
- **Timely:** The action should be something they can do in the short term — right away is even better.



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 continue to pollute our air and water and dump toxins into our communities. Fossil fuel companies are leaving all of us and our children to bear the cost and burden of sickness and suffering from the problems they created.
- Climate change is increasing temperatures and changing rainfall in ways that let disease-carrying mosquitoes, fleas, ticks and rodents thrive in new areas. This change speeds up the spread of 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.
- Governments and businesses are more likely to dispose of toxic materials near neighborhoods that are home to families with lower incomes and families of color. Too often, extreme weather events like storms or flooding are made worse by climate change and cause residents to be exposed to dangerous pollution.
- Trees and parks play a critical role in keeping neighborhoods cool in extreme heat. The difference between nearby neighborhoods with trees and parks and those with more concrete and asphalt can be up to 20 degrees. Decades of decisions by governments and businesses have led to the reality that the hottest neighborhoods are most likely home to people with fewer resources and families of color.

- A person’s age, health or where they work, learn and live can lead to more health harms from climate change. For example, hotter days, climate pollution, smog and other climate impacts lead to higher risk of premature birth and low birth weight and can cause problems with a baby’s brain development.

Supporting Messages on Solutions:

- Our work to improve health and address climate change must be done in a way that helps those with the greatest needs and families who have already been exposed to the greatest harms from fossil fuel pollution and climate change.
- Investing to make buildings more energy efficient and reducing pollution through a switch to electric appliances, heating and cooling reduces utility bills and pollution and leads to cleaner air in our homes and neighborhoods.
- 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 replacing concrete and paved areas with parks and plants makes it easier and safer to be more physically active, makes our air cleaner and helps prevent climate change.

Supporting Messages on Hope:

- 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 for a healthier, safer and more prosperous future for everyone.