

CALIFORNIA CALL TO ACTION ON CLIMATE, HEALTH, AND EQUITY

2019

As California’s leading health organizations—representing public health, health care, health systems, and community health organizations—we call on all California local, regional, and state policymakers to act now to significantly reduce climate pollution and build climate resilience. **We call on Governor-elect Newsom to recognize climate change as a health emergency and to work with local, regional and state leaders to prioritize action on the recommendations below to protect the health of Californians in the era of climate change.**

Climate change is a global health emergency. It is impacting the health of California communities today, and is the “greatest public health challenge of the 21st century.”^{i,ii} As UN Secretary General António Guterres has said, climate change poses “an existential threat to humanity.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Extreme heat, year-round wildfires, droughts, and other climate-related events have already caused thousands of deaths, displaced thousands of Californians from their homes over the last decade, and are increasing in frequency and severity. Air pollution, whose primary driver—fossil fuel combustion—is also the primary driver of climate change, causes thousands of deaths in California annually. Vector-borne diseases are spreading to new communities. The agricultural, food, and water systems we depend on for our survival are under threat.^{iv,v,vi,vii,viii}

Equity must be central to climate action. Climate change exacerbates health inequities, disproportionately harming the most vulnerable among us—children and women, the poor, indigenous people, immigrants, marginalized people of all races and ethnicities, outdoor workers, the aged and people with disabilities and chronic illness. Communities that have experienced systemic neglect and environmental racism have the least responsibility for climate pollution, but are the most affected. These communities have less access to the political, economic, and social resources that enable them to cope with climate threats and face potentially unmanageable pressures as the impacts of climate change mount.^{ix,x,xi} State climate policies and investments must serve to redress these inequities.

Action to reduce climate change can dramatically improve health. Many policies that move us towards our climate goals have demonstrable and significant health benefits. Climate action in the energy, transportation, land use, housing, agricultural, and other sectors has the potential to avoid millions of preventable deaths each year globally.^{xii} Shifting to renewable energy, sustainable food production and diets, active transportation, and green cities will lower climate pollution while simultaneously reducing the incidence of communicable and non-communicable disease, improving mental health, and promising significant health care cost savings.

Without transformational action, climate change will be increasingly severe—leading to more illness, injury, and death; mass migration; and worsening health inequities. By **mobilizing climate action for health and health action for climate**, California can remain a leader in establishing and achieving ambitious emissions reduction goals and building healthy communities that are resilient in the face of climate risks.

This is a crucial moment. We need to ratchet-up commitments to climate action and accelerate action to protect our health and that of future generations. **With the right policies and investments today, we have the opportunity to realize our vision of healthy people in healthy places on a healthy planet.** The priority actions outlined below are urgent and essential steps to protect health and advance the well-being of Californians in the era of climate change.

CLIMATE ACTION FOR HEALTH

Making health integral to climate policymaking at all levels and across all sectors offers a major opportunity to strengthen support for climate action, advance climate solutions, and achieve ambitious health targets through win-win strategies that promote climate justice and health equity. We urge Governor-elect Newsom and California’s leadership to advance the following priorities.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- 1 Meet and strengthen greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments and support the Paris Agreement.** A large and rapid reduction in carbon emissions is essential for our health and the health of future generations. California must build on its climate leadership, commit to aggressive emissions reductions sufficient to achieve a target of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and continue to engage with sub-national and national leaders to encourage and support others to do the same.
- 2 Transition away from the use of coal, oil and natural gas to clean, safe, and renewable energy.** California has already set ambitious goals for renewable energy and energy efficiency. Changing our energy use and systems will allow California to meet growing energy needs affordably, while reducing climate and air pollution. Key policies include:
 - Ensure that climate policies support sustainable energy for all by promoting distributed renewable energy and zero emission transportation technologies, with a priority on disadvantaged communities.
 - Support a rapid reduction of petroleum and natural gas use in transportation through steady investment and regulations requiring the transition to zero emission vehicle technologies as quickly as possible across the transportation sector, including transit and school buses, airport shuttles, delivery trucks and other goods movement vehicles and ride-hailing passenger fleet services.
 - Achieve California’s goals for building efficiency and a zero carbon future by reducing carbon impacts from new and existing buildings. Transition away from wood-burning and natural gas use for home heating and cooking to maximize health benefits and reduce conventional air pollutants alongside reductions in carbon and short-lived climate pollutants.
 - Assess and address the health impacts of oil and gas extraction and production on urban and rural communities, for example through “setbacks” for sensitive populations and stronger protections against fossil fuel industry impacts on clean air and water.

- Develop a plan and timeline for reduction of fossil fuel extraction in California.

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Emphasize active transportation in the transition to zero-carbon transportation systems. Shifting from driving to active modes of travel—walking, bicycling, and public transit—can substantially reduce rates of non-communicable diseases and injuries.^{xiii} Key policies include:

- Direct California transportation agencies to make transportation carbon reductions central to their mission and ensure all state transportation program expenditures align with the goals of reducing climate pollution, vehicle miles traveled and supporting healthier communities and travel choices for all Californians.
- Significantly increase the percentage of transportation investments for infrastructure and programs to promote safe walking and cycling, and for affordable, accessible and convenient public transit infrastructure, maintenance, and operations.
- Invest in affordable housing throughout California to avoid displacement and super-commuting based on families' ability to afford housing near jobs.
- Establish targets for the vehicle miles traveled reductions necessary to achieve strengthened regional greenhouse gas emissions targets along with incentives and accountability to meet them.

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Build local, healthy, and sustainable food and agricultural systems. By changing what we eat, and how we grow, harvest and transport our food, we can protect our health and significantly reduce our carbon footprint. Practices that reduce food waste, conserve and regenerate our soil, conserve and protect our water, and sustain our fisheries are essential to safeguard our food supply in the face of climate impacts. Building resilient local food systems can support the livelihoods of agricultural communities, expand access to healthy food, and reduce carbon emissions. Key policies include:

- Establish an inter-agency task force to develop a state plan and goals to prioritize and enable sustainable agro-ecological and regenerative practices that reduce reliance on industrial animal-based agriculture and environmentally damaging agricultural and fisheries practices, including strategies to protect clean water.
- Encourage California's children to enjoy healthy plant-based diets and reduce consumption of factory-farmed meat by implementing a strategy to provide meat-free options in all subsidized school meals.

5

Ensure that all Californians have access to safe and affordable drinking water and a sustainable water supply. There is nothing more fundamental to human existence than water.^{xiv} Key policies include:

- Provide adequate funding to assure safe and affordable drinking water to all Californians.
- Enhance regulations to prevent water contamination, invest in programs for water conservation, efficiency, and infrastructure maintenance, and ensure full and rapid implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

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Invest in policies that support a just transition for workers and communities adversely impacted by the transition to a low-carbon economy. A sustainable and equitable low-carbon economy requires shared prosperity including fair employment and economic opportunities for workers and communities that rely on and are impacted by fossil fuel industries.^{xv,xvi,xvii} Key policies include:

- Assess and alleviate impacts on workers and communities potentially effected by job or economic losses related to climate policy, through inclusive engagement with stakeholders.
- Advance a just transition through greater investments in workforce training and development, local hiring programs, and community-directed infrastructure with a focus on jobs-housing-transit balance.

HEALTH ACTION FOR CLIMATE

Proactive support is required to expand health sector efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in health facilities; build resilience through the integration of climate considerations in health systems, policies, programs, and investments; and effectively communicate the health threats of climate change together with the health benefits of climate action.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- 7 Engage the health sector voice in the call for climate action.** Proactive health sector leadership in climate communications can significantly increase public support for transformative climate action. Key policies include:

 - Implement a coordinated statewide cross-agency social marketing campaign, using lessons from public health campaigns such as tobacco control, to emphasize the health impacts of climate change and the health benefits of climate action.
- 8 Incorporate climate solutions into all health care and public health systems.** California's public health agencies must address climate change as a health emergency. California's hospitals and health care systems should implement climate-smart health care, build facility resilience, and leverage their economic power to decarbonize the supply chain and promote equitable local economic development. Key policies include:

 - Proactively support integration of climate change into all relevant state and local public health programs and appoint individuals to key health positions that are committed to address the nexus of climate, health, and equity.
 - Establish a public-private task force to assess the current state of California's health care system resilience and implement recommendations to improve it.
 - Support policies to advance implementation of climate-smart energy, water, transportation, food, anesthetic gas and waste management practices in California's health care facilities, including compatible health facility building codes.
 - Develop incentives for use of low-carbon care pathways and models of care, including community-based interventions that reduce the need for more environmentally impactful acute and clinical care.
 - Support re-design of all health professional curricula to better prepare the health workforce to lead in climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 9 Build resilient communities in the face of climate change.** Climate change is a global phenomenon, but it is people and communities at the local level that experience its consequences. Climate and health action will be most effective when those most impacted have the voice, power, and capacity to be full partners in building a healthy, equitable, and climate resilient future. Key policies include:

 - Deeply engage communities most impacted by climate change and poor health outcomes in planning, policy development, and budgeting, giving them meaningful roles and power in decision-making processes.
 - Support adequate planning and funding to protect communities from the adverse health impacts of climate change, beginning with robust urban heat island mitigation through tree canopy and green space and measures to increase availability of climate-adapted housing.
 - Integrate and provide guidance on assessment of the health benefits (or risks) of proposed state and local climate solutions and investments.

FINANCING CLIMATE ACTION FOR HEALTH AND HEALTH ACTION FOR CLIMATE

Achieving goals for climate, health, and equity will require that climate investments consider health impacts and benefits, and that investments in health take climate considerations into account.

PRIORITY ACTION

10 Invest in climate and health. Allocate resources to enable the health sector to effectively protect the health of Californians in the face of climate change, starting with support for local health departments to address climate change.

Together, these ten policy recommendations provide a roadmap for California to develop coordinated strategies for simultaneously tackling climate change, health, and equity. Our organizations represent physicians, nurses, hospitals and health care systems, public and environmental health agencies and organizations. We have dedicated our lives to improving the health of our communities. We believe that all people, including future generations, have the right to the environmental, economic and social resources needed to live healthy and productive lives.

Climate change is a health emergency. We call on Governor-elect Newsom and all California leaders to act now to stop climate pollution, promote resilient communities, and support healthy people on a healthy planet.

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- i <http://www.who.int/globalchange/global-campaign/cop21/en/>
 - ii [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60854-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60854-6/fulltext)
 - iii <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/05/1009782>
 - iv <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/environment/5975e6cf7/climate-change-disaster-displacement-overview-unhcrs-role.html>
 - v <http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/02-05-2018-9-out-of-10-people-worldwide-breathe-polluted-air-but-more-countries-are-taking-action>
 - vi <https://health2016.globalchange.gov/vectorborne-diseases>
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 - viii <http://www.thoracic.org/about/newsroom/press-releases/journal/health-of-the-air-2017-report.pdf>
 - ix <http://www.who.int/globalchange/GenderClimateChangeHealthfinal.pdf>
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