

How to get started as a health professional advocate for climate policy solutions



Climate change is impacting the health and well-being of people in every region of the United States. If we do not act quickly to transition away from fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy, the long-term effects could be catastrophic. As health professionals, we have an ethical responsibility to take action to protect the health of our patients and communities. As trusted messengers, we also have a unique opportunity to influence public opinion and policymaking in support of climate solutions. Here are some tips and resources to help you get started as a policy advocate.

Step 1: Find your story

In order to truly influence people, including potential allies as well as policymakers, you need to be able to communicate clearly why you personally care about climate change's impact on health.

Ask yourself these questions to get started:

- What sparked my concern?
- How are those closest to me impacted?
- What impacts do I see in my community?

Practice sharing your story with friends or other climate and health advocates to improve your storytelling.

Step 2: Do your homework

To be an effective advocate for healthy people and a healthy planet, you do not need to be an expert on climate science or energy policy. Still, knowing the facts will increase your confidence, help you educate others, and connect individual stories to larger trends. The following resources can advance your understanding of climate change and health:

Climate science introduction: "[Climate Change 101](#)" from the Health and Equity Guide by the Center for Climate Change and Health.

Climate and health:

- The Center for Disease Control's Climate and Health [webpage](#).
- "Air Quality" and "Human Health" chapters of the [National Climate Assessment](#) report.
- For a global perspective: the [annual report](#) on climate and health from the Lancet Countdown.

Policy solutions:

- [U.S. Call to Action on Climate, Health, and Equity](#), a 10-point policy agenda endorsed by more than 130 health and medical organizations.
- [Project Drawdown](#), a research organization that reviews, analyses, and identifies the most viable global climate solutions.

Step 3: Find your allies

Amplify your voice by joining one of the many groups of health professionals advocating for climate solutions nationally or locally. Groups help you learn about timely advocacy opportunities, strengthen your advocacy skills, and prevent burnout.

If there isn't a group of health professionals near you, connect with an existing group in another region to learn how to start your own.

National:

- [Health Care Without Harm's Physician Network](#)
- [Nurses Climate Challenge](#)
- [Medical Students for a Sustainable Future](#)
- [The Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments](#)
- [The American Lung Association's Health Professionals for Clean Air and Climate Action](#)
- [Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health](#)

State:

- Join a local chapter of [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#).
- The Medical Society Consortium keeps an [updated list](#) of state health professional climate and clean air groups.
- Find out if your state professional association has a climate change committee.

Step 4: Strengthen your advocacy skills

Effective advocates know how to mobilize the public to build a stronger movement while also directly influencing policymakers. Sharpen your advocacy skills by learning how to craft effective messages, host effective meetings with elected leaders, and work with the media to reach a wider audience.

- Craft powerful climate messages with [“Connecting on Climate: A Guide to Effective Climate Change Communication.”](#)
- Talk about health and climate using resources from [Climate for Health](#).
- Hold an effective [meeting with a legislator](#).
- Write persuasive [letters to the editor and op-eds](#).
- Learn how to use [social media to amplify your message](#).

Step 5: Leverage your trusted voice

Health professionals have a unique opportunity to refocus the climate conversation to be about health and help build the political will necessary to implement meaningful solutions. Look for regular opportunities to share your personal climate and health story and leverage your role as a trusted messenger to educate and inspire others:

- Set up meetings with your elected representatives at all levels of government.
- Speak at city council meetings.
- Respond to current climate events with letters to the editor.
- Contact local clubs, community organizations, local colleges, or your place of worship to give presentations on climate and health.
- Communicate with those closest to you, your colleagues, neighbors, and family.