

## Encouraging Public Officials to Lead on Climate and Health

**Overview:** Public officials can be convinced that leading on climate as a health and safety issue will be effective, not only in creating climate solutions that work to protect and enhance the health and safety of people in communities they represent, but also in gaining popular support for their leadership.

There are seven steps to engaging public officials to lead on climate and health.

### STEP 1. Establish your role and your values.

#### Sample Message:

**As a health professional, like almost all health professionals, I care deeply about the health and safety of my own family, my patients and my community, and I work hard to ensure their health and safety.**

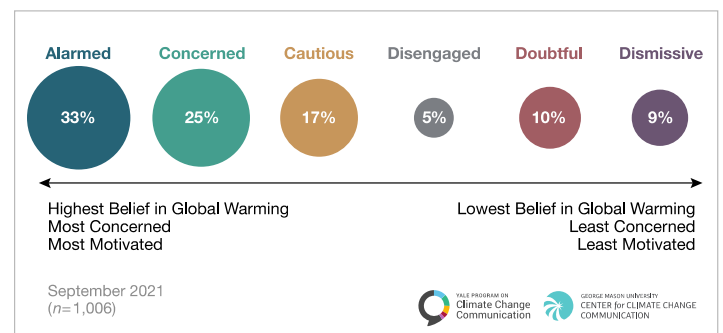
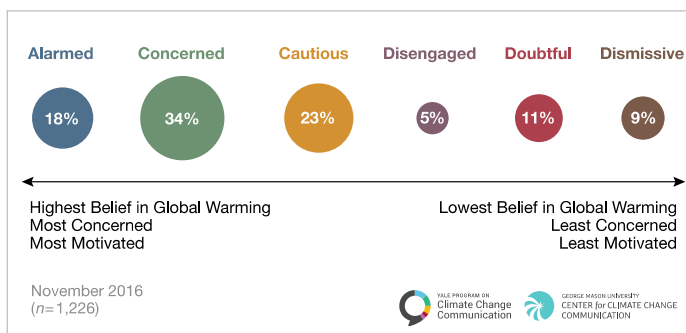
#### Key Points:

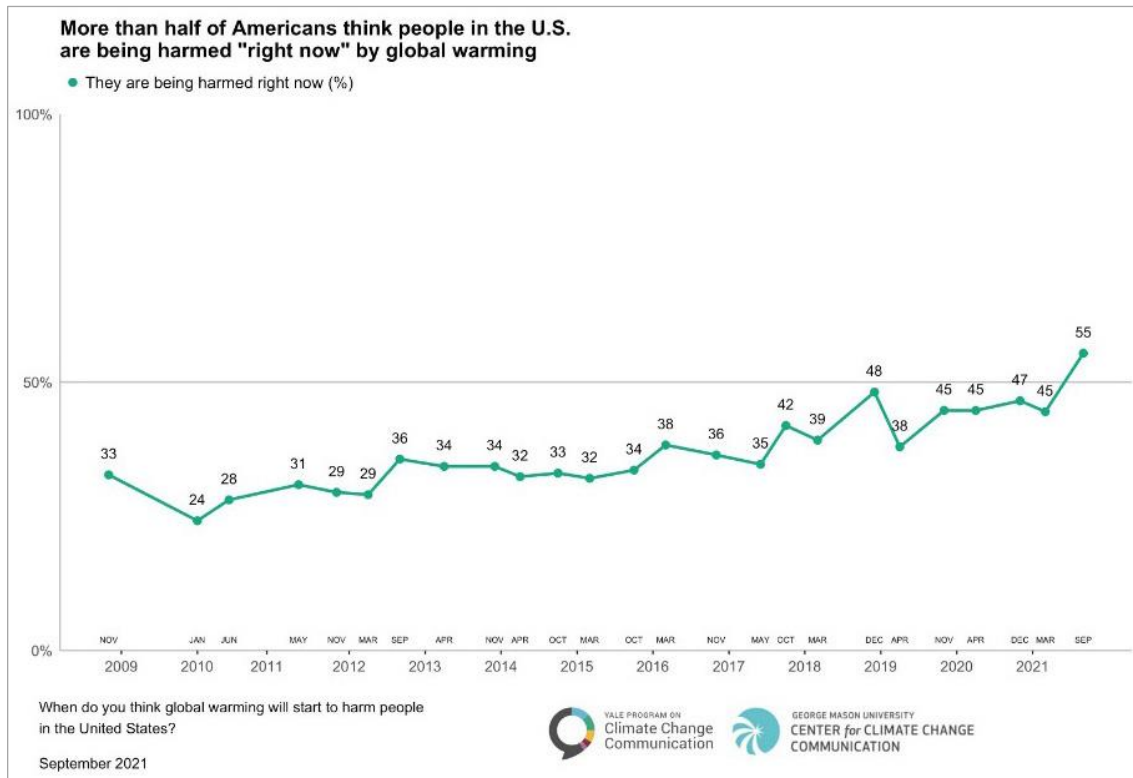
- My calling is to help everyone stay healthy and treat them when they are ill.
- One of the most important ways I can help people be healthy and safe is to make sure they have a healthy and safe community in which to live, work and go to school.
- When my patients and communities are exposed to threats to their health and safety, I believe it is our responsibility to speak out and advocate for remedies on their behalf.

### STEP 2. Establish that there's been a sea change in public concern about climate change, and in public understanding that climate change is a threat to human health and safety.<sup>1</sup>

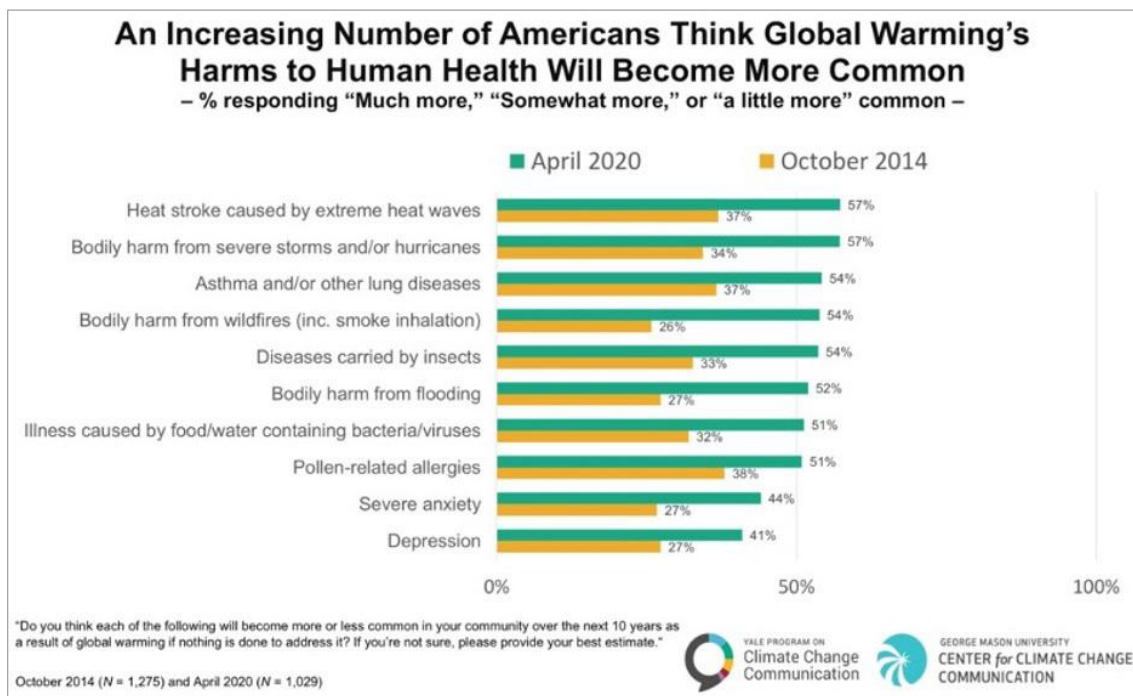
#### Key Points:

- **Americans' concern about harms from climate change has reached a new high point.** Between 2016 and 2021, the percentage of Americans who are "alarmed" about climate change has grown from 18% to 33%, while the percent who are "dismissive" has remained at nine percent. Also, for the first time, most Americans say that climate change is already harming people in the United States.





- **Americans are increasingly seeing climate as a threat to health and safety.** Between 2014 and 2020, there was a dramatic increase in the number of Americans who understand that the health harms from global warmings are becoming more common.



### STEP 3. Establish that public support for climate action increases when people learn how climate change is harming the health of Americans.

Some examples of the health harms that are most engaging include:

- **Poor Air Quality.** Climate change reduces 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, droughts and heat waves, which can lead to illness or 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, or greatly increasing demand.

### STEP 4. Establish that public support for climate action increases when people learn these actions will rapidly make their community a healthier, safer, nicer place to live.<sup>2</sup>

#### Key Points:

- The burning of fossil fuels creates the heat-trapping pollution that is the primary cause of global warming and also causes the air pollution which harms our health in many ways.<sup>3</sup> Global warming, in turn, makes air pollution worse. Many solutions to climate change reduce the pollution and make our air cleaner and rapidly improve our health.<sup>4</sup>

Some specific examples of the health and safety rewards of climate action include:

- **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 lose weight 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” (including electric school buses) 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 (for better health and more efficient energy use) 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 and regenerative agricultural practices, and reducing food loss and food waste will reduce emissions and improve health by increasing access to healthier and safer foods.

### STEP 5. Establish that engaging the public on climate change as a health and safety issue is a winning political strategy.

#### Key Point:

Research shows that talking about the health harms of climate change and the rapid, local health benefits of climate solutions engages people across the political spectrum—especially people in the middle of the spectrum including Independents and moderate Republicans.

**STEP 6. Preempt the “yes buts.” Some public officials will say that their constituents will raise concerns about harms to the economy from climate solutions, or that some people will be left out of the benefits. You can pre-empt (or, when necessary, respond) to these concerns.**

**Key Messages:**

- Research shows that climate solutions benefit not only people’s health, they also save people money by reducing health care costs, and they create jobs.<sup>4,5,6</sup> These cost savings far outweigh the costs of implementing the solutions.<sup>7</sup>
- We need to and we can put a priority on ensuring that we protect the health and well-being of those who are most at risk from climate harms.
- It’s true that some fossil fuel jobs will be lost, but coal jobs have been disappearing for years, and climate solutions can—and must—be implemented in ways that help these people get good jobs in the growing clean energy economy.<sup>8,9,10</sup>
- Failure to implement climate solutions means failure to protect the health, safety, and well-being of all Americans.

**STEP 7. Make the ask!**

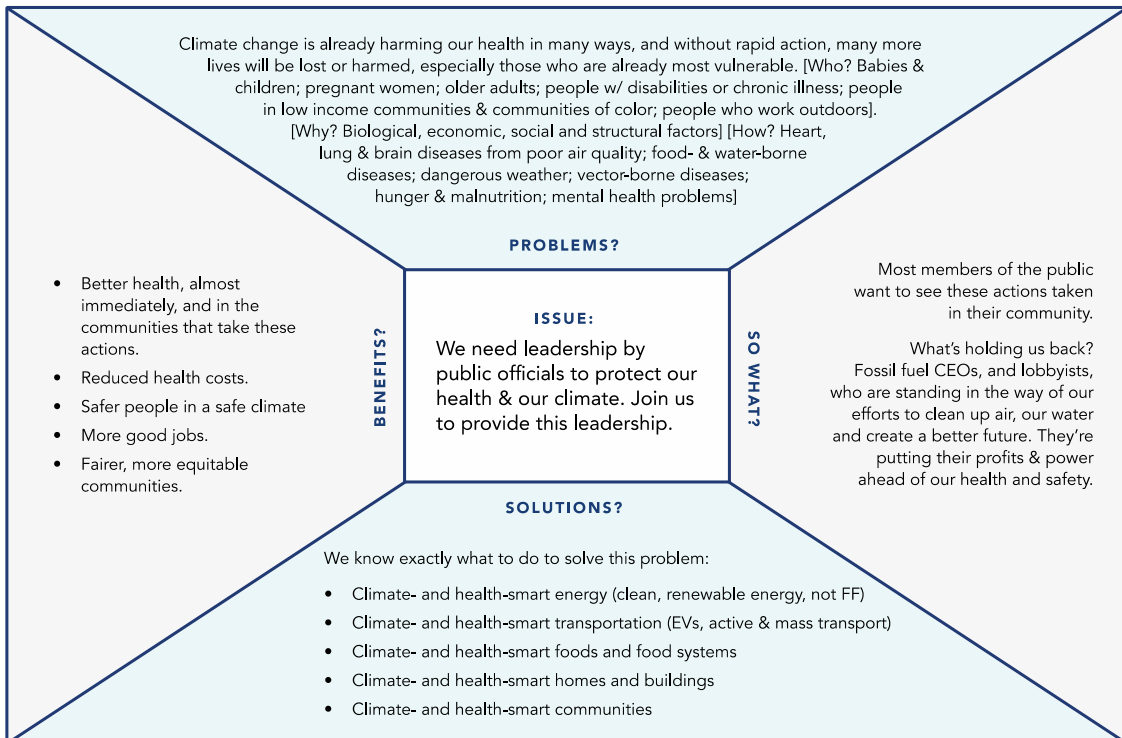
**While the specific ask for leadership will vary, it is best to begin:**

We ask that you stand with our growing movement of health professionals, who the public sees as the most trusted sources of information about climate and health, in supporting policies that will make a difference (e.g., and by having your member join the twitter storm planned for 3/9 by.....)

**The Message Box**

Audience: Public Officials

**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.



## Citations

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- <sup>1</sup> Kotcher et al. (2018). How Americans respond to information about global warming's health impacts: Evidence from a national survey experiment. *GeoHealth*, 2, 262–275. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2018GH000154>
- <sup>2</sup> Kotcher J, Maibach E, Choi W. Fossil fuels are harming our brains: identifying key messages about the health effects of air pollution from fossil fuels. *BMC Public Health* 2019 Aug 28;19(1):1079. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31455278/>
- <sup>3</sup> Quantifying the Emissions and Health Benefits of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy. [https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/documents/mbg\\_2-4\\_emissionshealthbenefits.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/documents/mbg_2-4_emissionshealthbenefits.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> De Alwis, D., Limaye, V. (2021). The Costs of Inaction: The Economic Burden of Fossil Fuels and Climate Change on Health in the United States. *Natural Resources Defense Council*. <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/costs-inaction-burden-health-report.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> Schaufnagel DE, et. al., Health Benefits of Air Pollution Reduction. *Annals of the American Thoracic Society* Vol 16, No 12, pp 1478–1487, Dec 2019.
- <sup>6</sup> Black R. Climate Economics: costs and benefits. *International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) | Renewable Energy & Jobs - annual review 2021*.
- <sup>7</sup> Saha D, Jaeger J. America's New Climate Economy: A Comprehensive Guide to the Economic Benefits of Climate Policy in the United States. *Report of the World Resources Institute*.
- <sup>8</sup> Saha D, Jaeger J. July 28, 2020. <https://www.wri.org/insights/10-charts-show-economic-benefits-us-climate-action>
- <sup>9</sup> Pai, S., Emmerling, J., Drouet, L., Zerriffi, H., Jewell, J. (2021). Meeting well-below 2°C target would increase energy sector jobs globally. *One Earth*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2021.06.005>
- <sup>10</sup> Saha, D., Neuberger, J. (2021). Steps to Aid US Fossil Fuel Workers in the Clean Energy Transition. *World Resources Institute*. <https://www.wri.org/insights/steps-aid-us-fossil-fuel-workers-clean-energy-transition>