Engaging Health Professionals on Climate

INSIGHTS FROM THE 2022-23 CLIMATE + HEALTH PEER LEARNING CIRCLE
Today's Agenda

- Hello & Welcome!
- Role of Health Professionals
- Insights that support health professionals to communicate for climate action
- Climate and health message Framing recommendations
- Wrap Up

Key Objectives

- Learn about the role of health professionals as effective messengers on climate, and the strengths and challenges in engaging them as an audience

- Be introduced to strategies and other insights that support health professionals to communicate for climate action to their peers & the public

- Gain an understanding of key recommendations for framing climate and health messages that spark engagement
What is the Climate Advocacy Lab?
What is the Climate Advocacy Lab?

We equip the US climate movement with the evidence-based insights, skills, and connections needed to build durable power and win equitable solutions.

Who We Serve

- **3,700+ members from 1,500+ organizations**
- From all 50 states, DC, & Puerto Rico, and several sovereign tribal nations
- 2/3 advocates, 1/3 mix of social & data scientists, funders, consultants
- Over 15% of members (200+ orgs) are environmental & climate justice organizations
How We Do It
The Climate + Health Peer Learning Circle
Our Intention

Share learnings, frameworks, tools and resources and provide ongoing support for leaders and organizations engaging health professionals on climate.
What We Covered...

1. Building Strategic Capacity & Understanding Narrative Capacity
2. Deep Dive into Creating Your Narrative & Narrative Strategy
3. Building an Effective Communications Strategy
4. From Messaging to Action: How do we use our comms to increase engagement?
5. Monitoring & Evaluating your Strategic Communications Efforts
Why Health Professionals? The role of health professionals as effective messengers on climate
The Health Angle is in fact Compelling

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Health professionals are credible messengers

Source credibility: a combination of expertise and trust/relatability.
Health Professionals Are Trusted Messengers to the Public

Various surveys and polls consistently show health professionals rank among the most trusted individuals and sources of information.
Health Professionals Are Credible Messengers: They have expertise

While health professionals typically extensive education and training, which gives them specialized knowledge and expertise in their field, their **first-hand experience** and positionally provides credibility as well.

*They see the every day impacts on their patients and can share then (like I’ve seen the rate of asthma increase...)*
What do we know about health professionals as an audience?
Findings from the Lab’s Academic Literature Review & 2022 Climate + Health Interviews

Overview

Research Question: What strengths, weaknesses, and challenges exist for climate+health advocates in their capacities to effectively communicate for climate action?

WHO?

Member-based organizations engaging health professionals on climate change in the US

- Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment (C-CHANGE)
- Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action
- Partnership for Southern Equity’s Climate Change, Health and Equity (CCHE) Dept.
- Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
- EcoAmerica
- Climate Health Now
- Healthy Professionals for a Healthy Climate
- Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health
Audience: What do we know?

Health professionals are concerned about climate change.

- Widely believe *climate change is happening* and is causing/will cause health problems.
- Many feel a *responsibility to help*.
**Main barriers to translating health professionals concern into advocacy behavior**

**Perceived lack of knowledge & communication skills**

- Some health professionals are reluctant to engage because they feel they lack sufficient knowledge about climate change and health.
- Even among the most engaged health professionals, there is a need for more educational resources:
  - continuing education (86%), communication training (80%), and materials to educate patients (75%).
- Concerns about lack of communication training creating fear, powerlessness, and lack of agency.

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"Finding what their story is, being able to package it in a compelling way, knowing to to communicate on it. Overwhelmed that they have to translate complex information. Need to feel more comfortable stepping outside their lane."
Main barriers to translating health professional concern into advocacy behavior

Lack of self-efficacy
“I am capable of acting!”

Lack of perceived support from professional organizations and leadership

Quote
We want more orgs to understand that any health professional can talk about this as an expert and is valid to speak to health impacts, doesn’t have to be an old physician with a white coat and a stethoscope. This creates imposter syndrome within health professionals, and they feel like they don’t have enough knowledge/expertise to talk about it.

Quote
[Climate change] can be seen as political and health providers are supposed to be non-political, right? But since we’ve made it such, there’s just a lot of hesitancy from people speaking publicly. We are all employees or affiliated with health care institutions, and some of them are really, really strict and can be punitive if you’re speaking and they don’t like what you’re saying.
Insights that support health professionals to effectively communicate for climate action
Building Efficacy

**Efficacy**

- **Self-efficacy:** “I am capable of acting!”
- **Response efficacy:** “Politicians will listen!”
- **Collective efficacy:** “We are more powerful when we act together!”
- **Collective response efficacy:** “Solutions will work!”
Building Efficacy

Try something like this (it hits all three forms of efficacy):

"Your voice matters [self-efficacy], so make sure it’s heard [response-efficacy]. We are more powerful when we act together! Join us [collective efficacy] at our town hall meeting next week so that we can demand the leaders at our hospital to take action on climate.”
Tap into existing identities and reinforce activist identity

Identity Formation Theories

- We look at our *past actions* and create an identity for ourselves based on how we have acted historically.

- We create an identity for ourselves based on *who we want to be* (and *how we want others to see us*) and then take actions that align with that identity.
Reinforce activist identity through goal-setting, reminding people of past actions

Dear [INSERT NAME]---As an adviser to the National Association of Doctors, I’ve appreciated how you’ve shared your thoughts on the health system with us in the past. I thought of you when I saw this email that National Association of Doctors sent earlier in the week. Signing this pledge gives you the chance to stand up for your values that you expressed when you wrote that:

you want reform that “provides a basic level of coverage for all Americans and those in need without discrimination on basis of race, socioeconomic status, ability to pay, etc.”

Whether or not you agree with how health reform has progressed, signing this pledge gives us the chance to recommit to our values and reclaim our role as physicians. Will you do it?

“People who received personalized goals messages were almost three times as likely to sign the petition as those who received the standard message.”

Hahrie Han, 2016; Physicians for Social Responsibility
Using Legitimation Rhetoric

Legitimation Rhetoric

- Characteristics of “risky political action”:
  - Unfamiliar, uncertain outcomes
  - Social interactions with unpleasant and/or hostile people

Will you help lobby your local Congressperson? Please know that many people tell us they feel nervous about taking this on. It’s entirely understandable if you feel the same way. But it’s important to do...
Using Legitimation Rhetoric

[First, acknowledge that the action could be uncomfortable/scary] "Please know that many people tell us they feel nervous about taking this on."

[Then, affirm your leader's feelings.] "It's entirely understandable if you feel the same way. But..."

EXAMPLE:

I know that as health professionals, we're often encouraged to stay in our lanes and not speak out on issues that may seem controversial to others, **BUT** as health professionals, it is our responsibility to protect the health and well-being of the people.
Leverage the power of Social Norms (aka peer pressure)

- Most Americans underestimate the extent to which other Americans care about climate change and support action taking (pluralistic ignorance)

- “Social norms,” or the idea that other people like you care, is an incredibly powerful social/behavioral force

- Social norms are ways of setting implicit expectations for how people act.

You are not alone. A growing number of 76% physicians agree that we should take a leadership role in encouraging offices, clinics, and hospitals to be as environmentally sustainable as possible.

Sarfaty, M., M. Mitchell, B. Bloodhart, and E. Maibach, 2014
At Grace Hospital, we show up for our patients daily, however best we can. We’re calling on our staff to take leadership in the climate movement to help protect our patients.

#ProtectOurPatients #TeamGrace

Leveraging **Shared Values**

Lead with feelings, not facts; reference shared values
- “I know you really care about childhood asthma…”

Connect identity to community that shares their values
- For health professionals, “care” and “compassion” for their patients or for the communities they serve can help them find their “in” to the movement who are also "caregivers" of the planet
Climate & Health Message Framing Recommendations
Messaging wisdom: Message strategy can have an impact (not little wording tweaks)

- In tests, people were equally likely to act regardless of whether the script mentioned:
  - “climate change”
  - “scientific research”
  - “in the US” vs. “in [state]” impacts*
  - “Recurrent flooding” vs. “Sea level rise”
- But framing in terms of “Free Market” vs. “Higher Rates” vs. “Health” **did** matter

*Other research paints a more complicated picture
Messaging wisdom: Customize for audience

- No one “magical message frame”
- Consider your audience (how they self-identify, what issues they care about, etc.)
- Use messages that match their motivations
**Framing climate change as a health issue**

- Overall, a frame about the **health impacts of climate change alone is ineffective** at moving policy support or behavioral intentions (but works moderately for liberals and those already concerned).

- In contrast to health harms, **framing in terms of health benefits works**.

- Combining a health frame with messaging about **climate solutions that evoke efficacy** is more effective than a health frame alone.

- Health and climate messages presented as **people-centered stories and lived experiences** are more effective.
Thanks For Joining

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