

JOINT COMMITMENT STATEMENT on CLIMATE CHANGE and HEALTH

Nurses recognize that climate change is threatening life as we know it. In light of the current and increasing health threats from climate change, nurses are committed to investing in the necessary knowledge and skills to address the physical and psychosocial health needs of the American public, to engage in mitigation activities in our personal and professional lives, to participate in climate change-related disaster responses, and to support and engage in policy discussions to ensure equitable care for all Americans in the face of climate impacts.

Climate change is causing extreme, extended heat spells; both flooding and droughts across the country and other extreme weather events including larger and hotter forest fires, more severe hurricanes, and winter storms. The landscape implications of climate change will threaten farming practices and crop yields as well as job stability and the long-term security of our food supply. There are a wide range of human health and safety and mental health threats that are posed by the impacts of climate change, of which health professionals are well aware.

Nurses are the most trusted sources of health information to the American public and live in virtually every community. We are in hospitals, clinics, schools, workplaces, nursing homes, and we are members of most American families. In 2016, nursing organizations signed a Joint Commitment Statement on Climate Change and Health, recognizing the need for nursing leadership in helping our patients, our communities, and our health care institutions to engage in necessary climate change mitigation activities and in preparing for the inevitable effects of climate change. Since that statement, nurses and nursing organizations have advanced the following priorities:

- Educating ourselves about the health impacts of climate change and staying up to date on the latest peer-reviewed research from subject matter experts.
- Informing our patients and their families and the communities we serve about climate change, the associated health effects, and ways in which to mitigate and respond to climate change.
- Collaborating with communities to respond and prepare for climate change-related emergencies.
- Promoting greenhouse gas reductions efforts across healthcare systems, clinics, and other health institutions.
- Advancing integration of climate change and health, including mitigation, adaptation, and resilience in nursing schools, colleges and universities.

- Utilizing our professional expertise within our communities and through our nursing organizations in policy arenas at the local, state, and national level to advocate for policies and standards that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect communities, and ensure just and equitable distribution of resources for those who are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts.
- Advancing research agendas that address the impacts of climate change through nursing interventions.

We recognize that the climate health emergency demands widespread action and collaboration. This unity, cooperation, and support from the Biden Administration and all relevant offices will serve us well in protecting the health of all Americans. Our organizations call for continued support from the Biden Administration and federal agencies in protecting the public's health through the following actions:

- Declare climate change a public health emergency

According to the World Health Organization,¹ climate change is impacting human lives and health in a variety of ways with the potential to undermine decades of progress in global health. Globally and nationally, climate change threatens clean air, safe drinking water, food supplies and safe shelter. According to the Environmental Protection Agency,² every person living in the United States faces a risk of health impacts associated with climate change. Moreover, some people face higher risks due to differences in the hazards to which they are exposed, their sensitivity to these hazards, and their ability to adapt. We ask that the Biden Administration use all the tools available to rise to the urgency of this moment, declaring a climate emergency.

- Cut climate pollution 50% by 2030

In order to meet the urgency of the moment, nurses and environmental health advocates insist that the Biden Administration enact intentional and measurable efforts to decrease our dependence on fossil fuels while transitioning to a cleaner energy economy utilizing renewable energy sources.

- Enact cleaner car standards and transition to zero emission vehicles

The Biden Administration has an opportunity to protect public health and fight the climate crisis with strong long-term clean car standards. With the transportation sector being the largest source of greenhouse gases in the United States, the EPA must move swiftly to enact the strongest

¹ World Health Organization (2022). Climate Change. https://www.who.int/health-topics/climate-change#tab=tab_1

² Environmental Protection Agency. (2021, December 2). Understanding the Connections Between Climate Change and Human Health. <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/understanding-connections-between-climate-change-and-human-health>

possible long-term clean car standards to clean our air, keep Americans healthy, and combat the climate crisis through 100% zero emission vehicles by 2035.

- Ensure Justice40 implementation is meeting stated goals

The Biden Administration has committed to returning 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. With the funding committed through this initiative and the Inflation Reduction Act, evaluation and feedback processes must be in place to ensure that Justice40 goals are being met and funds are reaching those most adversely impacted by pollution.

- Mandate active decarbonization efforts across health systems and practice settings

The healthcare industry is among the most carbon-intensive service sectors in the industrialized world³ with the U.S. healthcare system being responsible for about a quarter of all global healthcare greenhouse gas emissions.⁴ The U.S. healthcare system contributes anywhere from 8-10%⁵ to our nation's total greenhouse gases. With numerous health sector leaders voluntarily pledging to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the federal government must go a step further and require decarbonization efforts throughout the health care sector. Voluntary pledges are beneficial but insufficient. Requirements to reduce such emissions must be in place.

- Require a whole government approach to addressing the climate crisis

Nurses work in complex interdisciplinary environments, and a federal response to climate change will require a similar interdisciplinary approach. In order to address climate change, communication, planning and collaboration must be undertaken using a whole government approach. Rather than traditional siloed practices, a comprehensive response to climate change must involve all agencies of the federal government with mechanisms for cross-department and interdisciplinary collaboration efforts.

- Promote climate health education for nurses to prepare for climate related events

Climate change and its health impacts, along with emergency preparedness training, must be taught in all pre-licensure nursing programs. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen that nurses are critical frontline workers in providing an effective emergency response system. Therefore, education on climate change and its impacts on human health is critical in all pre-licensure nursing programs as well as in continuing nursing education offerings. We ask that the Biden Administration promote the need for climate education by enlisting the Department of

³ Eckelman, M.J., Huang, K., Lagasse, R., Senay, E., Dubrow, D., J.D. Sherman (2022, December). Health Care Pollution And Public Health Damage In The United States: An Update. *Health Affairs*, 39(12).
<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.01247>

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Seervai, S., Gustafsson, L., Abrams, M.K. (2022, April 19). How the U.S. Health Care System Contributes to Climate Change.
<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/explainer/2022/apr/how-us-health-care-system-contributes-climate-change>

Health and Human Services to work with nursing and nursing education leaders nationwide in generating climate health curricula and guidelines for nurses and front-line workers.

- Support federal dollars to research climate change and health

Funding needs are driven by data. Federal agencies, including the National Institute of Nursing Research and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, must support a new trajectory of nursing research regarding health and climate change to advance the science and further inform policy change.

Signed: