

RESOLUTION

Subject: Protecting Our Patients Amidst a Changing Climate

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Referred to: Reference Committee

WHEREAS, it is the consensus of the U.S. and international scientific community that average global temperatures have been steadily increasing, a phenomenon that can be attributed in large part to human activity^{1,2,3,4}; and

WHEREAS, climate change is already creating conditions that harm the health of Kentuckians, including through the physical and psychological consequences of extreme storms, the personal and economic costs incurred by flooding and droughts, the increasing incidence of vector-borne diseases, the diminishing air quality, and the growing risk of food insecurity and unsafe drinking water^{5,6,7,8,9,10,11}; and

WHEREAS, one specific example of how warming temperatures and diminishing air quality negatively affect human health is that daily maximum temperatures and degree of air pollution have been shown to have a statistically significant association with adverse respiratory and cardiovascular outcomes and even death^{12, 13}; and

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Medical Association (AMA) have called climate change “the greatest public health challenge of the 21st century”⁸; and

WHEREAS, despite the AMA supporting medical schools incorporating climate change topics into curricula, only 20 of 140 surveyed have a class that includes information on environmental health or global warming¹⁴; and

WHEREAS, to address the serious and time-sensitive threat of climate change, the Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health was established by member organizations including the AMA, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychiatric Association, American College of Physicians, Infectious Diseases Society of America, and many others¹⁵; and

WHEREAS, joining the Consortium is an obligation-free, cost-free task that requires only endorsing the Consortium’s statement (below)¹⁵; and

WHEREAS, the health profession is among the most trusted in society, viewed as having no direct vested interest in policy decisions related to climate change other than their commitment to protect and improve human health and well-being^{8,16}; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Kentucky Medical Association acknowledge the deleterious effects that climate change has on health; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the KMA support educating the medical community about the adverse effects of climate change on health; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the KMA endorse the Consensus Statement of the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health, thereby becoming an affiliate member of the Consortium; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the KMA establish an ad-hoc committee, which will be tasked with reporting back at the 2020 KMA Annual Meeting, to investigate the ways climate change is affecting Kentuckians and to develop a strategy for best communicating these findings to members, patients, and the Kentucky legislature.

Consensus Statement from the Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health:

We – the undersigned medical societies – support the international scientific consensus, as established in multiple national and international assessments, that the Earth is rapidly warming, and that human actions (especially burning of fossil fuels) are the primary causes. As established in the 2016 U.S. Climate and Health Assessment – The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment – the resulting changes in our climate are creating conditions that harm human health through extreme weather events, reduced air and water quality, increases in infectious and vector-borne diseases, and other mechanisms. While climate change threatens the health of every American, some people are more vulnerable and are most likely to be harmed, including: infants and children; pregnant women; older adults; people with disabilities; people with pre-existing or chronic medical conditions, including mental illnesses; people with low-income; and indigenous peoples, some other communities of color, and immigrants with limited English proficiency.

As medical professionals, many of our members know firsthand the harmful health effects of climate change on patients. We know that addressing climate change through reduction in fossil fuel use will lead to cleaner air and water, to immediate health benefits for Americans, and will help to limit global climate change.

We support educating the public and policymakers in government and industry about the harmful human health effects of global climate change, and about the immediate and long-term health benefits associated with reducing greenhouse gas emissions (i.e., heat-trapping pollution) and taking other preventive and protective measures that contribute to sustainability. We support actions by physicians and hospitals within their workplaces to adopt sustainable practices and reduce the carbon footprint of the health delivery system.

We recognize the importance of health professionals' involvement in policy-making at the local, state, national, and global level, and support efforts to implement comprehensive and economically sensitive approaches to limiting climate change to the fullest extent possible.

Our organizations are committed to working with officials at all levels to reduce emissions of heat-trapping pollution, and to work with health agencies to promote research on effective interventions and to strengthen the public health infrastructure with the aim of protecting human health from climate change.

References

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- ⁹ Smith K, Woodward A, Campbell-Lendrum D, et al. Human health: impacts, adaptation, and co-benefits. *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. 2014:709-754.
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- ¹⁵ Call for organizational endorsement. <https://climatehealthaction.org/cta/climate-health-equity-policy/>. Accessed August 15, 2019.
- ¹⁶ McCarthy N. America's Most & Least Trusted Professions [Infographic]. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2019/01/11/americas-most-least-trusted-professions-infographic/>. Accessed August 15, 2019.

RELEVANT AMA POLICY

Global Climate Change and Human Health H-135.938

1. Supports the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's fourth assessment report and concurs with the scientific consensus that the Earth is undergoing adverse global climate change and that anthropogenic contributions are significant. These climate changes will create conditions that affect public health, with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and the poor.
2. Supports educating the medical community on the potential adverse public health effects of global climate change and incorporating the health implications of climate change into the spectrum of medical education, including topics such as population displacement, heat waves and drought, flooding, infectious and vector-borne diseases, and potable water supplies.
3. (a) Recognizes the importance of physician involvement in policymaking at the state, national, and global level and supports efforts to search for novel, comprehensive, and economically sensitive approaches to mitigating climate change to protect the health of the public; and (b) recognizes that whatever the etiology of global climate change, policymakers should work to reduce human contributions to such changes.
4. Encourages physicians to assist in educating patients and the public on environmentally sustainable practices, and to serve as role models for promoting environmental sustainability.
5. Encourages physicians to work with local and state health departments to strengthen the public health infrastructure to ensure that the global health effects of climate change can be anticipated and responded to more efficiently, and that the AMA's Center for Public Health Preparedness and Disaster Response assist in this effort.
6. Supports epidemiological, translational, clinical and basic science research necessary for evidence-based global climate change policy decisions related to health care and treatment.

Climate Change Education Across the Medical Education Continuum H-135.919

(1) supports teaching on climate change in undergraduate, graduate, and continuing medical education such that trainees and practicing physicians acquire a basic knowledge of the science of climate change, can describe the risks that climate change poses to human health, and counsel patients on how to protect themselves from the health risks posed by climate change; (2) will make available a prototype presentation and lecture notes on the intersection of climate change and health for use in undergraduate, graduate, and continuing medical education; and (3) will communicate this policy to the appropriate accrediting organizations such as the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation and the Liaison Committee on Medical Education.