CLIMATE CHANGE IS A HEALTH EMERGENCY

As Minnesota public health, environmental health, patient advocacy, healthcare, nursing, and medical organizations, we declare climate change a health emergency and call for immediate action to protect the public's health from the current and future impacts of climate change. Our organizations agree that:
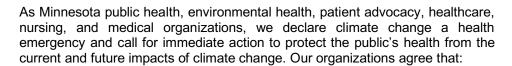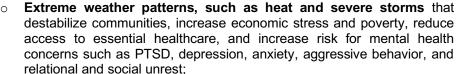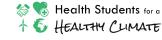
- The health impacts of climate change demand **immediate action.**

- The **science is clear**; MN communities are **experiencing the health impacts** of climate change, including:[1] [2]
  - Enhanced conditions for **ozone** and **particulate** air pollution, linked to asthma attacks, cardiovascular disease and premature death;
  - **Extreme weather patterns, such as heat and severe storms** that destabilize communities, increase economic stress and poverty, reduce access to essential healthcare, and increase risk for mental health concerns such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, aggressive behavior, and relational and social unrest;
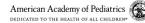 - **Amplification of health impacts** when broad social emergencies like pandemics and social unrest impact our communities, reinforcing personal and ripple ecologies of historical trauma[3] and existing social inequities;[4]
  - **Wildfires** and dangerous wildfire smoke that spreads for thousands of miles;
  - Increased **vector-borne diseases** by expanding seasons and geographic ranges for ticks, mosquitoes, and other disease-carrying insects; and
  - Longer and more intense allergy seasons.

- Those **most at risk** – including children, seniors, pregnant women, low-income communities, communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with disabilities and people with chronic disease, including mental health conditions – disproportionately bear the health impacts of climate change.[5]

- The structural racism that permeates economies, policies and civil society in Minnesota and throughout the U.S. is a cause of disproportionate climate change impacts on people of color and Indigenous people, including:
  - Greater harm from extreme weather events such a hurricanes, heatwaves, and flooding, due to underlying disparities in health, health care access, and lack of resources for community resilience;
  - Pollution of lands, waters, neighborhoods and communities due to fossil fuel and mineral extraction, processing, storage and transport;
  - Higher exposure to air pollution from vehicles, industrial facilities, coal burning and other sources;[6]
  - Some of the worst in the nation health disparities, including: shorter lifespan; higher rates of infant and maternal mortality; and higher incidence of asthma, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other diseases;[7] and
  - Exacerbation of all cumulative impacts of structural racism that already work through all the social determinants of health to expand inequalities and increase health care costs and reduce the overall resilience of society as a whole.

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[1] Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Climate and Health Profile Report, health.mn.gov/climatechange.
[2] Clayton S, Manning C, Krygsman K, Speiser M. Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance. American Psychological Assn., Climate for Health and EcoAmerica, March 2017.
[3] Thema Bryant Davis et al (2017). http://whereareyouquetzalcoatl.com/ace/DavisEtAl2017.pdf
[4] A Guide to Climate Violence: The World at 1^{0}C. https://worldat1c.org/a-guide-to-climate-violence-4cfbc5a7648f
[5] Rudolph L, Harrison C, Buckley L, North S. Climate Change, Health and Equity: A Guide for Local Health Departments. American Public Health Assn., Public Health Institute, Center for Climate Change & Health, 2018.
[6] Life and Breath How Air Pollution Affects Health in Minnesota, MPCA & MDH, June 2019.
[7] MN Department of Health, Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative: Fiscal Years 2015 to 2018 Report to the Minnesota Legislature 2019, March 2019.

- Urgent action is needed to address climate change by **cleaning up** major sources of carbon pollution and other greenhouse gases, including power plants, transportation, agriculture, industry, and other sources. These policies must:
  o Adopt science-based targets to prevent climate change above 1.5 C;
  o Maximize benefits to health, reducing carbon and methane pollution at the same time that they reduce other dangerous emissions from polluting sources; and
  o Ensure pollution is cleaned up in all communities, including those near polluting sources that have historically borne a disproportionate burden from air pollution.

- Communities must also have the tools and resources **to identify, prepare for, and adapt to the unique health impacts** of climate change in their communities, including:
  o Adequate resources for our public and environmental health systems to protect communities by identifying, preparing for, and responding to the health impacts of climate change;
  o Protection of those whose health is most at risk, and access to uninterrupted, quality healthcare during and after disasters; and
  o Access to mental health services to treat and support individuals who are experiencing psychiatric symptoms related to climate-related events.

- **We call on the Minnesota Legislature, the Governor of Minnesota, and City, County, and other local leaders to** heed the call of clear scientific evidence and take steps now to reduce pollution that drives climate change and harms health, including:
  o Adoption of policies that get Minnesota to the goal of zero carbon emissions from electricity by 2050 or sooner;
  o Adoption of goals and policies to reduce and eliminate carbon emissions from the transportation, industrial, and agricultural sectors;
  o Adoption of policies that create an equitable and just transition to a carbon-free economy for all citizens and communities, including expansion of career pathways into health professions for populations under-represented, particularly at leadership levels;
  o Adoption of broad policies to dismantle structural racism in siting and permitting of polluting facilities in MPCA-identified environmental justice areas of concern;[8]
  o Adoption of policies that allow for the provision of needed services to treat Minnesotans who are experiencing the physical and mental health impacts of climate change; and
  o Adoption of best practices in partnership with Minnesota's most impacted environmental justice communities to create specific, long-term projects to remediate existing environmental damage and invest in best available infrastructure and technology to support clean air, water, soil, and healthy housing in these communities.

Minnesota's public health, environmental health, patient advocacy, healthcare, nursing, and medical communities are **united in our efforts to combat climate change and to protect the health of Minnesotans from current and future climate impacts**.

Signed:

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments	Minnesota Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
American Lung Association in Minnesota	Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity
Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate	Minnesota Nurses Association
Health Students for a Healthy Climate	Minnesota Organization of Registered Nurses
Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians	Minnesota Psychological Association
Minnesota Association of African American Physicians	Minnesota Public Health Association
Minnesota Black Nurses Association	Twin Cities Medical Society

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[8] Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Environmental Justice Program has identified several Minnesota communities with higher populations of people of color and low income and federally recognized tribal areas.