

# OREGON CALL TO ACTION

## ON CLIMATE, HEALTH, AND EQUITY

**As Oregon’s leading health professionals and organizations—representing public health, health care, health systems, and community health organizations—we call on Governor Brown and State lawmakers to work with local, state, and national leaders to prioritize the recommendations below to protect the health of Oregonians.**

**We are joining with voices across our nation and the world to make it known that climate change has now become a health emergency<sup>12</sup>.** It is impacting the health of Oregon communities today and is the “greatest public health challenge of the 21st century”<sup>34</sup>. Extreme heat, wildfires, droughts, and other climate-related events have already caused health impacts in the last decade, and are increasing in frequency and severity<sup>5</sup>. Air pollution, whose primary driver—fossil fuel combustion—is also the primary driver of climate change<sup>67</sup>. Vector borne diseases are spreading to new communities<sup>8</sup>. The agricultural, food, and water systems we depend on are under threat<sup>9</sup>.

**Action to reduce climate change can dramatically improve health.** Many policies that move us towards our climate goals have demonstrable and significant health benefits. Climate action in the energy, transportation, land use, housing, agricultural, and other sectors has the potential to avoid millions of preventable deaths each year globally and promise significant health care cost savings<sup>10</sup>. Without transformational action, climate change will be increasingly severe—leading to more illness, injury, and death; mass migration; and worsening health inequities.

**No one in Oregon is immune to the health effects of climate change, but some communities are more at risk than others.** Climate change is a “threat multiplier” - it makes existing health threats worse<sup>11</sup>. Communities that already bear a disproportionate burden of

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://climatehealthaction.org/media/cta\\_docs/US\\_Call\\_to\\_Action.pdf](https://climatehealthaction.org/media/cta_docs/US_Call_to_Action.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/05/1009782>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/globalchange/global-campaign/cop21/en/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60854-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60854-6/fulltext)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.keeporegoncool.org/climate-conversation-blog/2018/3/9/climate-change-hits-home>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/02-05-2018-9-out-of-10-people-worldwide-breathe-polluted-air-but-more-countries-are-taking-action>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/FilterDocs/DieselEffectsReport.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://health2016.globalchange.gov/vectorborne-diseases>

<sup>9</sup> <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/24#section-kf-key-message-4>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60931-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60931-X/fulltext)

<sup>11</sup> <https://archive.defense.gov/pubs/150724-congressional-report-on-national-implications-of-climate-change.pdf?source=govdelivery>

disease in Oregon, including communities of color and low-income households, are also more at risk of climate-related threats<sup>12</sup>. Not only that, but these same groups often have fewer resources and opportunities to prepare for, recover from, and adapt to climate impacts<sup>13</sup>.

**By mobilizing climate action for health and health action for climate, Oregon can be a leader in reducing climate pollution and building healthy, resilient communities.** This is a crucial moment. We need strong leadership on climate action to protect our health and that of future generations. The priority actions outlined below are urgent and essential steps to protect the health of Oregonians in this era of climate change.

## CLIMATE ACTION FOR HEALTH

Making health integral to climate policymaking at all levels and across all sectors offers a major opportunity to strengthen support for climate action, advance climate solutions, and achieve public health goals through win-win strategies that promote climate justice and health equity. We urge Governor Brown and Oregon lawmakers to advance the following priorities.

### PRIORITY ACTIONS

#### **1. Meet and strengthen Oregon's greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments.**

Oregon is no longer gaining ground in its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction efforts<sup>14</sup>. Oregon's GHG goals are not likely to be met with existing and currently planned actions. A large and rapid reduction in carbon emissions is essential. Key policies include:

- Do not further delay legislative action on establishing a statewide climate program. This program needs to be robust and able to lead the implementation of climate legislation that will help us meet our greenhouse gas emission goals, while also leading investments in climate adaptation and community resilience measures. The program needs to develop statewide strategies that coordinate and leverage across agencies and sectors to advance climate mitigation and climate adaptation in Oregon.
- The work of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction points to the need for Oregon to fully develop an economy-wide GHG cap and invest program<sup>15</sup> — or a comparably effective pricing mechanism. In combination with other state and local

---

<sup>12</sup><https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/CLIMATECHANGE/Documents/2018/2018-OHA-Climate-and-Health-Policy-Paper.pdf>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/CLIMATECHANGE/Documents/oregon-climate-and-health-profile-report.pdf>

<sup>14</sup><https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59c554e0f09ca40655ea6eb0/t/5c2e415d0ebbe8aa6284fdef/1546535266189/2018-OGWC-Biennial-Report.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.oregon.gov/gov/Pages/carbonpolicy\\_index.aspx](https://www.oregon.gov/gov/Pages/carbonpolicy_index.aspx)

government investments and policies, and private sector initiatives, this will enable the state of Oregon to get back on track with legislatively-enacted reduction goals.

- Oregon's consumption-based inventory of greenhouse gas emissions<sup>16</sup> shows that the state's consumption of goods and services like cars, food, fuels, appliances and clothing—many of which are produced in other states or overseas - is increasing every year. Oregon needs a plan for incentivizing households and businesses to adopt healthier, lower carbon footprints.

**2. Transition to clean, safe, and renewable energy.** Oregon is already a leader in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Changing our energy use and systems will allow Oregon to meet our growing energy needs affordably, while reducing climate and air pollution. Key policies include:

- Support a rapid reduction of petroleum and natural gas use in transportation through steady investment and regulations requiring the transition to zero emission vehicle technologies as quickly as possible across the transportation sector.
- Achieve Oregon's goals for building efficiency and a zero carbon future by reducing carbon impacts from new and existing buildings. Transition away from wood-burning and natural gas use for home heating and cooking to maximize health benefits and reduce conventional air pollutants alongside reductions in carbon and short-lived climate pollutants.
- Assess and address the health impacts of oil and gas extraction, production, pipelines and transportation on Oregon's communities and provide stronger protections against fossil fuel industry impacts on clean air and water.

**3. Increase investment in active transportation in the transition to zero-carbon transportation systems.** Transportation GHG emissions have risen over the last several years and there has been a lack in progress implementing the 2013 Statewide Transportation Strategy (STS) to reduce GHGs. Shifting from driving to active modes of travel—walking, bicycling, and public transit—can not only help us reach those goals, but substantially reduce rates of non-communicable diseases and injuries<sup>17</sup>. Key policies include:

- Move STS recommendations forward and direct Oregon transportation agencies to make carbon reductions central to their mission. This means prioritizing policies that incentivize low-carbon choices such as deploying electric vehicles and charging systems; electrifying transit and increasing transit service; and significantly increasing the percentage of transportation investments for infrastructure and programs that

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/mm/Pages/Consumption-based-GHG.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/CLIMATECHANGE/Documents/2018/2018-OHA-Climate-and-Health-Policy-Paper.pdf>

promote safe walking and cycling, and for affordable, accessible, and convenient public transit infrastructure, maintenance, and operations.

- Invest in affordable housing throughout Oregon to avoid displacement and super-commuting based on families' ability to afford housing near jobs.
- Establish targets for the vehicle miles traveled reductions necessary to achieve strengthened regional greenhouse gas emissions targets along with incentives and accountability to meet them.

**4. Build local, healthy, and sustainable food and agricultural systems. By changing what we eat, and how we grow, harvest and transport our food, we can protect our health and significantly reduce our carbon footprint.** Practices that reduce food waste, conserve and regenerate our soil, conserve and protect our water, and sustain our fisheries are essential to safeguard our food supply in the face of climate impacts. Building resilient local food systems can support the livelihoods of agricultural communities, expand access to healthy food, and reduce carbon emissions. Key policies include:

- Establish and sufficiently staff a public-private task force, or food policy council, to develop a state plan and goals that prioritize and enable sustainable food policy that reduces reliance on industrial animal-based agriculture and environmentally damaging agricultural and fisheries practices, including strategies to protect clean water.
- Increase support to Oregon farms that are growing our fruits and vegetables in sustainable ways.
- Encourage Oregon's children to enjoy healthy plant-based diets and reduce consumption of factory-farmed meat by implementing a strategy to provide meat-free options in all subsidized school meals.

**5. Ensure that all Oregonians have access to safe and affordable drinking water and a sustainable water supply.** There is nothing more fundamental to human existence than water. Key policies include:

- Provide adequate funding to assure safe and affordable drinking water to all Oregonians.
- Enhance regulations to prevent water contamination and develop a statewide plan for sustainable groundwater management. Invest in programs for water conservation, efficiency, and infrastructure resilience.

**6. Invest in policies that support a just transition for workers and communities adversely impacted by the transition to a low-carbon economy.** A sustainable and equitable low-carbon economy requires shared prosperity including fair employment and economic

opportunities for workers and communities that rely on and are impacted by fossil fuel industries<sup>1819</sup>. Key policies include:

- Build on existing efforts in Oregon to further assess and alleviate impacts on workers and communities potentially affected by job or economic losses related to climate policy, through inclusive engagement.
- Advance a just transition through greater investments in workforce training and development, local hiring programs, and community-directed infrastructure with a focus on jobs-housing-transit balance.

## HEALTH ACTION FOR CLIMATE

Proactive support is required to expand health sector efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in health facilities; build resilience through the integration of climate considerations in health systems, policies, programs, and investments; and effectively communicate the health threats of climate change together with the health benefits of climate action.

### PRIORITY ACTIONS

**7. Engage the health sector voice in climate policy and action. Health leaders are ready to engage in climate policy discussions and public education.** Health professionals can significantly increase public support for transformative climate action. Key policies include:

- Ensure that health leaders are at the table to maximize health co-benefits of climate policy and action.
- Implement a coordinated statewide cross-agency campaign, using lessons from public health campaigns such as tobacco control, to emphasize the health impacts of climate change and the health benefits of climate action.

**8. Incorporate climate solutions into all health care and public health systems.** Oregon's local health departments do not have adequate capacity to build climate resilience<sup>2021</sup>. Hospitals and health care systems need to implement climate-smart health care, build facility resilience,

---

<sup>18</sup><https://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/g20-climate/collapsecontents/Just-Transition-Centre-report-just-transition.pdf>

<sup>19</sup>[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_ent/documents/publication/wcms\\_432859.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf)

<sup>20</sup><https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/CLIMATECHANGE/Documents/2018/2018-OHA-Climate-and-Health-Policy-Paper.pdf>

<sup>21</sup><https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/ABOUT/TASKFORCE/Documents/PHModernizationReportwithAppendices.pdf>

and leverage their economic power to decarbonize the supply chain and promote equitable local economic development. Key policies include:

- Support state and local public health programs to work at the nexus of climate, health, and equity. Many health effects of climate change can be avoided through enacting changes in our policies, systems, and environments. Investing in our environmental public health infrastructure and early warning systems can help us prepare for projected health risks.
- Support policies to advance implementation of climate-smart energy, water, transportation, food, anesthetic gas and waste management practices in Oregon's health care facilities, including compatible health facility building codes.
- Develop incentives for CCOs, hospitals, and other providers to use low-carbon models of care, including population-based interventions that reduce the need for more intensive, environmentally impactful care.

**9. Build resilient communities in the face of climate change.** Climate change is a global phenomenon, but it is people and communities at the local level that experience its consequences. Climate and health action will be most effective when those most impacted have the voice, power, and capacity to be full partners in building a healthy, equitable, and climate resilient future. Key policies include:

- Meaningfully engage communities most impacted by climate change and poor health outcomes in the planning, policy development, and budgeting, giving them active roles and power in decision-making processes.
- Support adequate planning and funding to protect communities from the adverse health impacts of climate change, beginning with robust urban heat island mitigation through tree canopy, green space and availability of climate-adapted housing.
- Integrate health impact assessments of proposed state and local climate solutions and investments. A number of Oregon-specific studies address questions related to climate and health, but more work is needed to understand the economic value of health benefits and burdens of climate change and climate policy.

## **FINANCING CLIMATE ACTION FOR HEALTH AND HEALTH ACTION FOR CLIMATE**

Achieving goals for climate, health, and equity will require that climate investments consider health impacts and benefits, and that investments in health take climate considerations into account.

## **PRIORITY ACTION**

**10. Invest in climate and health.** We know that Oregonians value clean water, clean air, and a stable climate that enable all Oregonians to live healthy, prosperous lives. It's time to increase our investments in building and maintaining this quality of life for all, beginning with our most impacted communities.

- Allocate resources to enable the health sector to effectively protect the health of Oregonians in the face of climate change, starting with support for local health departments to address the physical and mental health effects of climate change.
- Ensure that climate investments are informed and led by the communities most affected by climate impacts and consult public health partners in the identification and engagement of communities most at risk.

Together, these ten policy recommendations provide a roadmap for Oregon to develop coordinated strategies for simultaneously tackling climate change, health, and equity. Our organizations represent physicians, nurses, hospitals and health care systems, public and environmental health agencies and organizations. We have dedicated our lives to improving the health of our communities. We believe that all people, including future generations, have the right to the environmental, economic and social resources needed to live healthy and productive lives in Oregon. We stand ready to partner with you in advancing these recommendations - it's time to take action.