



*We Will Empower Bold Change to Elevate
Human Flourishing.*

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT TO PROTECT HEALTH

THE ISSUE

In September 2021 over 200 medical journals, including the *New England Journal of Medicine*, issued a joint statement declaring "The greatest threat to global public health is the continued failure of world leaders to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5C and to restore nature." Health leadership groups in the U.S. such as the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association and the National Academy of Medicine have also declared that the impacts of global warming are a public health crisis.

We are already seeing the negative health impacts of global warming and environmental degradation. More frequent and intense extreme weather events such as heat waves, droughts, flooding, wildfires and hurricanes are causing a rise in deaths, injury and illness. In addition to physical harm, the devastation and loss resulting from these events have mental health impacts such as increased rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The changing climate and environmental degradation are also increasing insect-borne and water-borne infectious diseases, increasing and intensifying cardiovascular or respiratory illnesses, damaging water and food supplies, and displacing populations.

These impacts are not felt equally across our society. Pregnant women, children and people with pre-existing conditions are more sensitive to a changing climate. People in occupations that work outdoors, or first responders face more frequent and longer exposure to climate threats. Older adults and people with disabilities experience more barriers than others in preparing for and dealing with extreme weather events. Low-income Black, Latino, and Native American communities have increased exposure to climate threats due to generations of targeted disinvestment and environmental injustice.

Using data from recent extreme climate events health policy researchers are predicting the ecological crisis will impact all aspects of the health care system., Health care costs will rise as more people are impacted by extreme weather events and new or worsened chronic conditions; health disparities will be exacerbated; access to care will be limited by system disruptions such as evacuations, facility damage or closure, power outages, damaged roads or transit systems and displaced medical professionals; and quality of care will be affected if hospitals cannot provide additional capacity or acquire needed medicines or devices due to supply chain disruptions. In addition to meeting these new challenges the health care sector will also need to examine and address its own contribution to this crisis. The U.S. health care sector is responsible for 8.5 percent of the country's total greenhouse gas emissions, is a large consumer of water and generates significant amounts of waste.

Given the scope and magnitude of the ecological crisis and its impact on health and the health system, it is imperative that policy makers start to prioritize, fund and implement changes that protect the health of our communities and prepare the health care system to deliver care in increasingly unstable conditions.



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MINISTRY TRADITION

As a Catholic ministry which works to uphold the life and dignity of each human person, we recognize the interconnectedness between health and the political, social, economic, spiritual and environmental concerns which impact our nation. This integral ecology is a recognition that health, humanity and nature do not exist as separate entities but rather are inextricably connected by our creator and our responsibility to promote the “common good.” As a Catholic health ministry dedicated to continuing Jesus’s mission of love and healing to those in need, healing and caring for creation is therefore intricately linked to our efforts to care for those who come to Catholic health facilities in need of care.

CHA’S POSITION AND ACTIVITIES

Catholic health care is committed to protecting the environment, to minimizing environmental hazards and to reducing our contribution to the problem of global warming and biodiversity loss. Our members, supported by CHA, are working to raise the issue of environmental stewardship as a mission– based clinical and public policy imperative. As a reflection of this commitment, they have joined initiatives such as Health Care Without Harm’s Health Care Climate Council and Health Care Climate Challenge, the National Academy of Medicine’s Action Collaborative on Decarbonizing the US Health Sector, and the Vatican’s Laudato Si’ Action Platform.

Mitigate the impacts of global warming and environmental degradation

CHA supports efforts to transition the country to 100% clean, renewable energy which includes preserving existing federal tax credits for renewable energy. Transitioning to clean energy supports both healthy communities and energy independence

- Clean energy produces significantly less pollution than fossil fuels. Research shows that this pollution contributes to health issues such as asthma, heart disease, cancer, cognitive and development disorders and pregnancy risks. Clean energy also limits greenhouse gas emissions which are scientifically shown to increase global warming.
- Clean energy also benefits the economy and energy security by helping meet growing energy demands, reducing energy costs, creating jobs and providing energy stability. Keeping people healthy also brings economic benefits through increased worker productivity and lower absenteeism, lower health care costs and improved educational outcomes.

Build climate-resilient communities and health systems



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CHA supports efforts to help communities, public health and the health care sector adapt to the impacts of the ecological crisis. CHA encourages coordination among federal agencies and programs when addressing resilience given the wide scope of climate impacts across society – from the social determinants of health to the health care delivery supply chain and workforce readiness. CHA also encourages engagement with health care organizations so that efforts are effective and remove barriers to action.

- Community resilience - CHA supports engaging communities most impacted by the ecological crisis in planning, policy development, and funding decisions related to building resilience.
- Public health - Funding research and facilitating coordination among key stakeholders (including public health departments and federal agencies) to develop public health programs, policies and tools to protect those most vulnerable to climate risks. Supporting coordinated resilience planning at all levels of government and across appropriate agencies.
- Health care system – Providing funding and guidance to help health care organizations identify and address areas of vulnerability, including building codes to protect facilities from geographic specific climate threats, protecting supply chains, and building a climate-ready workforce that understands how care needs to adapt when communities are impacted by climate risks.