

OUR BIGGEST HEALTH CHALLENGE

Health professionals have always been on the front lines of caring for their patients and advocating for solutions to America's most pressing public health concerns. Today, as climate change delivers record-breaking storms, droughts, and increased pollution, health leaders are stepping forward to lead. The health and wellbeing of our children, families and future generations is at stake. We can make a difference. These talking points provide a starting point. Tailor and use them in your conversations and writing to build support for climate solutions.

1. ***I became a health professional because I care about health - the health of everyone in our community.*** I want to heal people, but it's also important to prevent the causes of illness and injury.
2. ***Each breath we take should be a healthy one, and caring for ourselves means caring for our climate.*** We can prevent further climate change and protect our health – and that of future generations – at the same time.
3. ***Fossil fuels damage our climate and are dangerously unhealthy.*** We know these dirty fuels pollute our air and water. And, the toxic pollution we're adding to the atmosphere is steadily building up to dangerous levels.
4. ***Some people are more vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change, including children, the elderly, the sick, low-income, and some communities of color.*** Our efforts to stop pollution help all of these groups live longer, healthier lives.
5. ***If we stop pollution from fossil fuels, we can slow climate change and improve our health, now and for future generations.*** We reduce diseases and illness brought on by pollution - and - we slow the rising temperatures that are changing weather patterns and causing more intense storms and severe weather conditions, all of which threaten our health.
6. ***It is up to us, as respected community leaders, to lead on climate and leave a legacy of health.*** We can speak with authority on the climate and health connection, and convey the myriad of health benefits of stopping climate pollution.
7. ***Of all the things we'd love to leave our children and future generations, a healthy place for them to raise children of their own may be the most important.***

COUNTERPOINTS

Following are the current main arguments against shifting to clean energy or addressing climate change, along with suggested responses.

1. Climate change is a long term environmental issue, not a public health challenge today.

Response: Environmental issues are health issues. We need clean air, clean water, and thriving nature for good health. Pollution from fossil fuels causes climate change and unhealthy communities. And, climate change threatens water supply and crops. The American Public Health Association says that climate change is the biggest public health threat we face. APHA's fact sheets are available [here](#).

2. Climate change is a big political debate. The whole issue has not been proven.

Response: Just like tobacco, or lead... companies and industries that will lose money if their products are regulated try to deny and mislead us about those products. Climate change has been no different. It is only these companies (plus politicians and other leaders who accept their donations) who are propagating climate change debate, denial and doubt.

3. My job is to care about patients, to make people healthy, not to get involved in policy debates that don't make a difference now.

Response: Our professional code of ethics calls for us to address the social determinants of health, such as poverty, access to clean water and clean air, hunger, nutritional food, and disparities in healthcare delivery. It's certainly our role and responsibility to advocate for public policy that utilizes the precautionary approach that focuses on prevention of hazards to people and to the natural environment.

4. It's a question of priorities. I think working on opioids, obesity, disease, and nutrition will make a much bigger difference in people's health than working on climate change.

Response: We all need to do what we can about all the health issues, and we certainly can't ignore any of them. We should make sure we're accurately informed, and do what we can about any of the major health issues. So you should reduce your own pollution, and speak up on climate change in your personal life, in your workplace, and in your community, including at the voting booth, whenever the topic arises.