

Americans Voice a Clear Call for Health Professionals to Lead on Climate

OVERVIEW

There is a clear and urgent opportunity for the health sector to inform and support Americans on climate change as a matter of health, according to ecoAmerica's latest American Climate Perspectives Survey (ACPS) 2024.

With record-breaking heat last July, there is a [98% likelihood that 2023-2027 will be the hottest five-year period on record](#), signaling the urgency for climate action. Escalating humanitarian crises due to extreme weather events like heatwaves, wildfires, floods, and hurricanes threaten to [reverse decades of health progress](#). Climate change poses multifaceted threats to human health, increasing the risk of illness, injury, and death through direct exposure to extreme weather and the spread of infectious diseases. Hazards such as air and water pollution compromise essential resources like air, water, and food, endangering public health. Moreover, the psychological toll of climate-related disasters exacerbates mental health challenges. Additionally, climate health risks [disproportionately impact the most vulnerable populations](#), raising equity and justice concerns.

Against this backdrop, ecoAmerica's survey captures a growing awareness among Americans about the health impacts of climate change. 70% of Americans have heard that climate change can affect their health. However, more Americans acknowledge the health impacts on others (69%) than themselves (46%), likely due to cognitive dissonance.

Fairness factors into American climate attitudes, most notably regarding the disproportionate health impacts of climate change on younger generations. Over three-quarters (77%) of Americans believe it is unfair that young people will encounter more extreme impacts than older people. There is similar sentiment (71%) regarding lower income people, and similar still (66%), yet with notable differences across political affiliations regarding Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

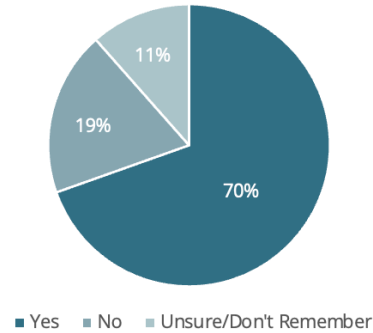
The survey also finds that the health sector and local health professionals can play a larger role in educating people about health and climate connection. Most Americans (69%) trust health professionals for climate health information and, 61% want to learn how to protect their health from adverse climate effects such as poor air quality, extreme heat, or severe storms. By disseminating accurate information and guidance across a variety of mediums (including direct conversations), the health sector can empower Americans to protect their health from climate-related risks and advocate for broader systemic changes to address climate change in inclusive, just, and equitable ways.

Majority of Americans Link Climate Change to Health

Most Americans have heard that climate change can affect health. The survey finds that 70% have heard this, while 11% are unsure. Only a small proportion, 19%, say no.

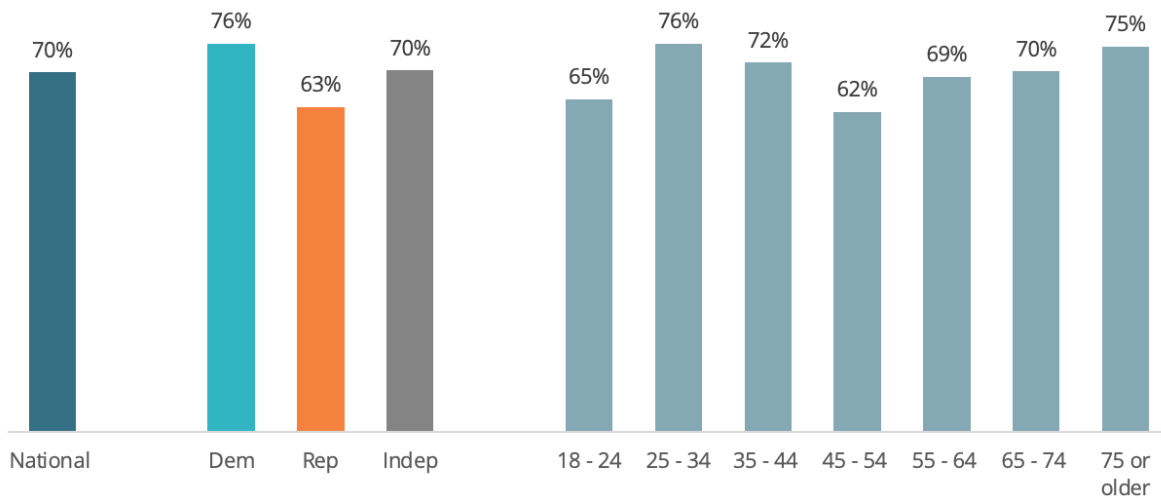
This consensus is observed across party lines and age groups. 76% of Democrats, 63% of Republicans, and 70% of Independents have heard climate change can affect health. Similarly, most (>60%) across all age groups are aware of this.

Climate Change Affects Health: 70% of Americans say Yes. Survey question: Have you heard that climate change can affect your health? 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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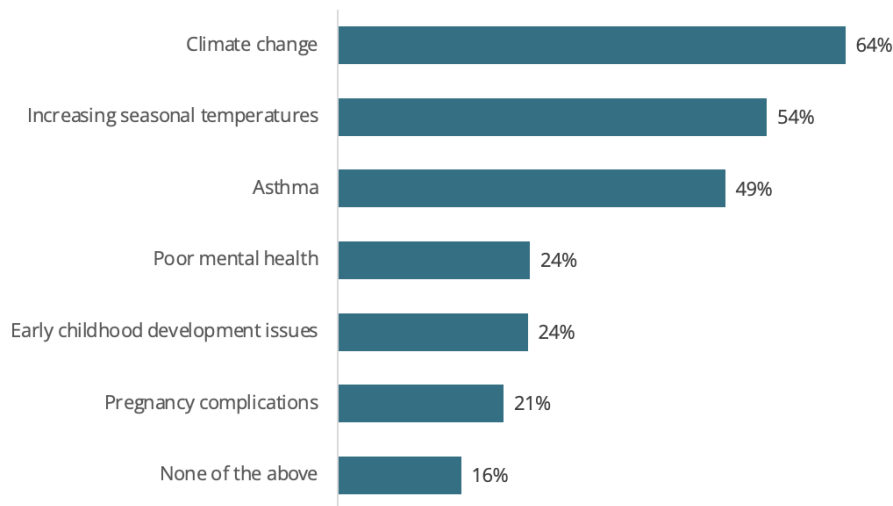
Majorities of Americans are aware that climate change can affect their health. Survey question: Have you heard that climate change can affect your health? "Yes". 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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Moreover, the ecoAmerica survey reveals that 64% of Americans link climate change to burning fossil fuels and air pollution. About half associate burning fossil fuels and air pollution with increasing seasonal temperatures (54%) and asthma (49%). However, fewer connect poor mental health, early childhood development issues, and pregnancy complications to these factors. This presents an educational opportunity for health professionals to offer guidance on the breadth of health impacts of burning fossil fuels and climate change.

Majority of Americans relate climate change to burning fossil fuels and air pollution. Survey question: Do you think that any of the following are related to burning fossil fuels and air pollution 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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Americans See Climate Change More as A Health Risk for Others vs. Themselves

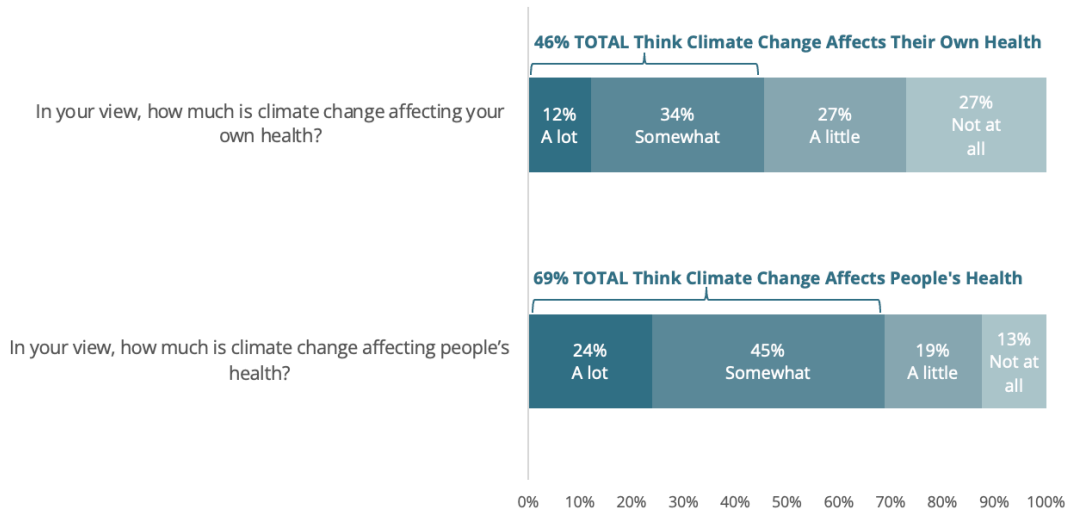
Just less than half (46%) of Americans believe climate change affects their health, with 12% saying “a lot” and 34% saying “somewhat.” Adding in the 27% who say climate change affects their health “a little” brings the total to 73%. Over a quarter (27%) believe climate change does not affect their health at all.

While these findings suggest that Americans are beginning to see the impacts on their own health, they also show that many more think climate change affects people’s health in general. Twice as many Americans (24%) believe climate change affects people’s health “a lot,” and 45% believe it affects people’s health “somewhat,” totaling 69%, a 23-point increase versus beliefs regarding personal health impacts. Adding in the 19% saying it affects others’ health “a little,” totals 88%.

Cognitive dissonance theory may explain why people hold distorted perceptions and believe others are more affected by climate change than themselves.¹ Effective communication by healthcare professionals could play a key role in reducing this dissonance by highlighting climate change impacts on personal health in communities and underscoring the urgency of local climate action.

¹ Katharina van Baal, Stephanie Stiel, and Peter Schulte, “Public Perceptions of Climate Change and Health—a Cross-Sectional Survey Study,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 2 (January 13, 2023): 1464, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20021464>.

Perceptions of Climate Change Impact on Health: Self vs. Others. Survey questions: 1) In your view, how much is climate change affecting your own health? 2) In your view, how much is climate change affecting people's health? 1,006 national respondents. Showing total agree +/- 3% margin of error.



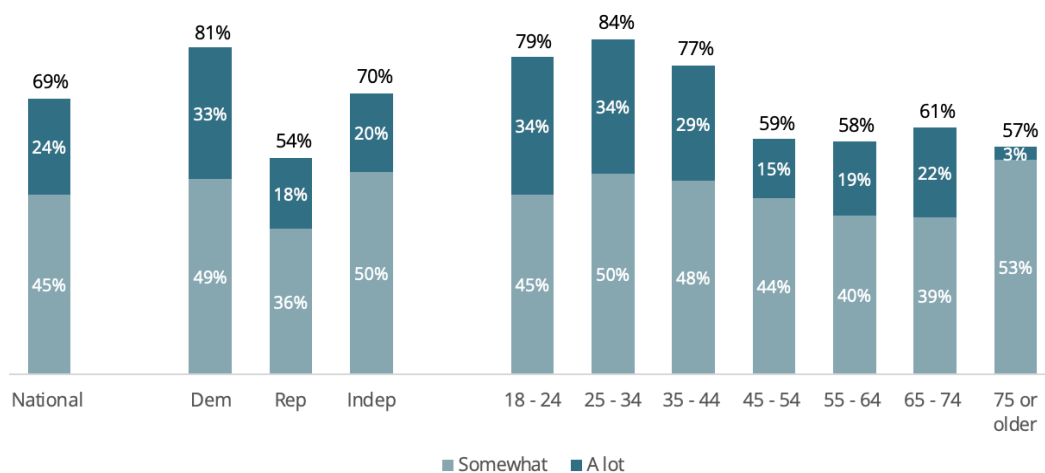
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Majority Across Party Lines and Ages Agree: Climate Change *Is* Affecting People's Health

Across party lines, a majority of Democrats (81%) believe that climate change is affecting people's health, while over half of Republicans (54%) believe the same. 70% of Independents agree. Well over half of Americans across ages understand that climate change is affecting people's health, with people under 45 years old showing the strongest understanding. These results indicate that there are opportunities to boost climate and health understanding amongst Republicans and with people ages 45 and older.

Most Americans across party and age believe that climate change is affecting people's health.

Survey question: In your view, how much is climate change affecting people's health? 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.

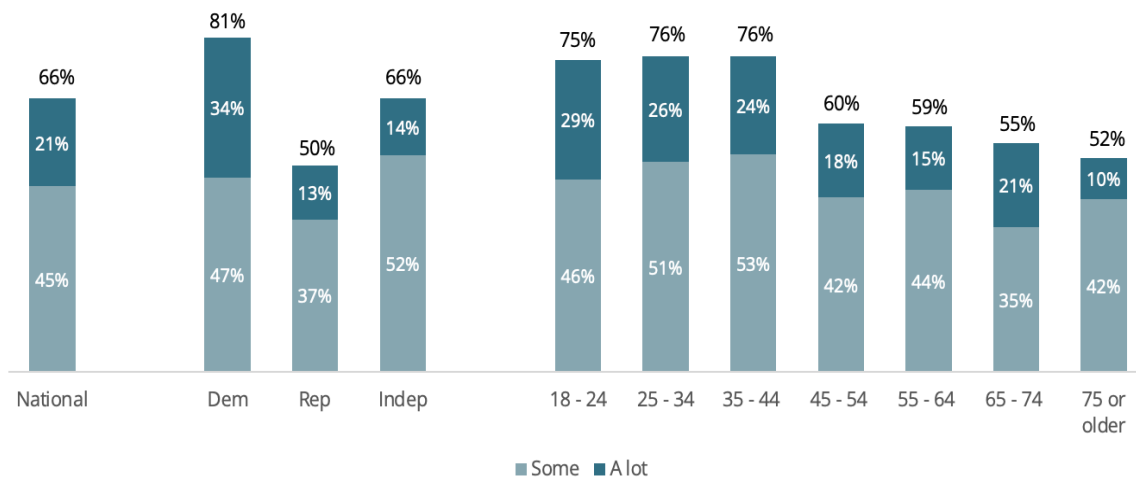


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Politics and Age Shape Trust of Climate and Health Information

ecoAmerica finds that most Americans (66%) trust the information they receive about the health effects of climate change. The trust in climate health information remains relatively strong across demographics, however, there are notable differences across political affiliation and age groups. 81% of Democrats, 50% of Republicans, and 66% of Independents trust the information they receive about the health effects of climate change. Over half of Americans across all age groups trust the health information they receive about climate change, however, people under 45 years of age report considerably higher levels of trust.

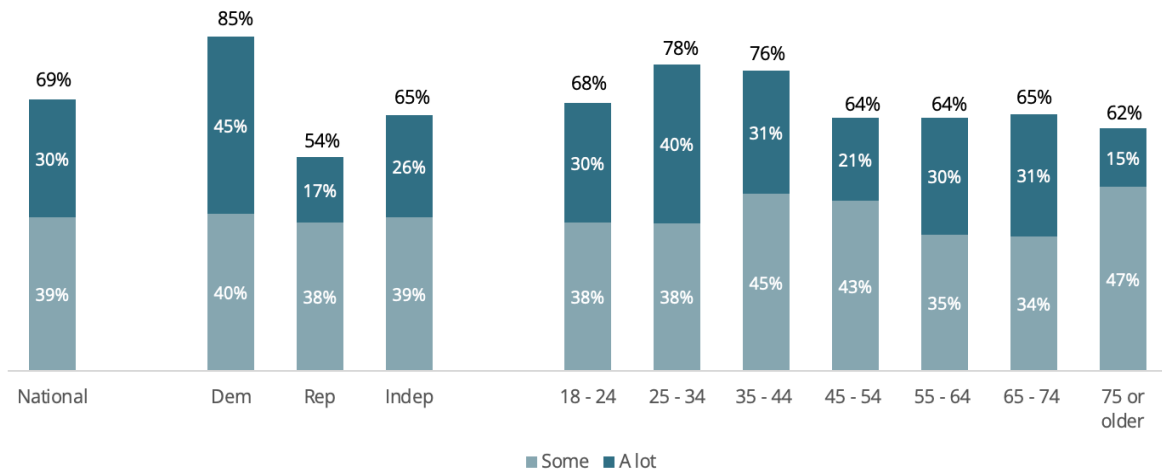
Politics and Age Shape Trust of Climate and Health Information. Survey question: How much do you trust the information you have received about the health effects climate change? 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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Some good news for the health sector: ecoAmerica’s survey reveals a stronger trust in information about the health effects of climate change when it is delivered through health professionals. 69% of Americans trust health professionals for climate change information, with 85% of Democrats, 54% of Republicans, and 65% of Independents reporting this level of trust. Across ages, an encouraging majority (>60%) trust health professionals for information on climate change, which is of particular note in people ages 45 and older.

Majority of Americans trust health professionals for climate change information across party and age. Survey question: As a source of information about climate change, how much do you trust health professionals?? 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.

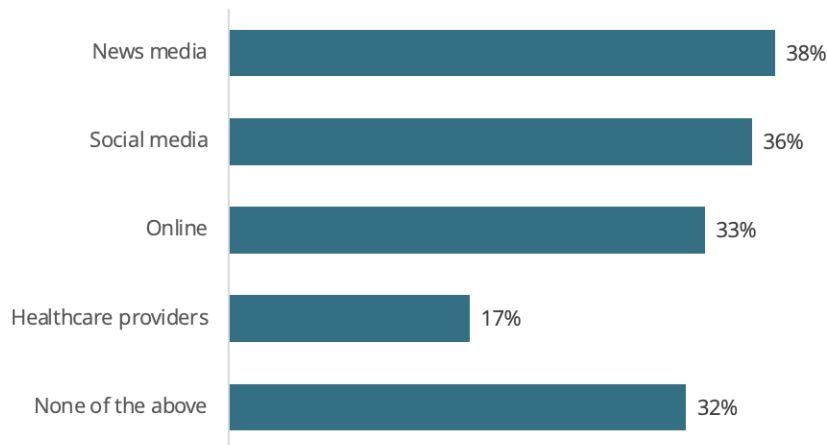


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Few Americans are Hearing about Climate and Health, but Most Want to

Too few Americans are hearing about climate and health. Only a little over a third of Americans report receiving information about climate change and its health effects from news and social media or online. Fewer still (17%) report receiving similar information from healthcare providers.

Too few Americans Are Hearing About Climate and Health Across Sources. Survey question: Have you ever received information about climate change and its health effects from any of the following? 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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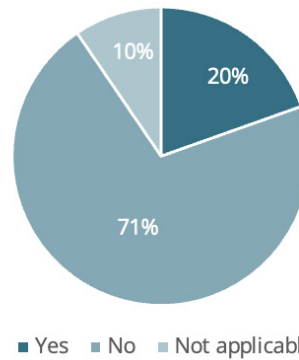
Only one-fifth of Americans have discussed the health effects of climate change with a doctor or other healthcare provider. As climate and health impacts accelerate, more Americans will be seeking guidance from health professionals, pointing to the need to be ready with information and support.

Climate change effects such as poor air quality, extreme heat, and severe storms can impact people’s health, resulting in respiratory illness, heat stroke, and mental health stress, among a breadth of health issues.

ecoAmerica’s survey finds that most Americans (61%) want to learn how to protect their health from these effects. This sentiment holds across demographics: 71% of Democrats, 54% of Republicans, and 58% of Independents want to learn more about how to protect their health from adverse climate change effects. Similarly, over half of all age groups (>50%) express interest in learning about protecting their health from climate change impacts. These findings reinforce the urgent opportunity for the health sector to invest in efforts to train health professionals and educate their patients and the public on how to care for their personal and familial health as our climate changes.

One-fifth of Americans have discussed climate change health effects with healthcare providers. Survey question:

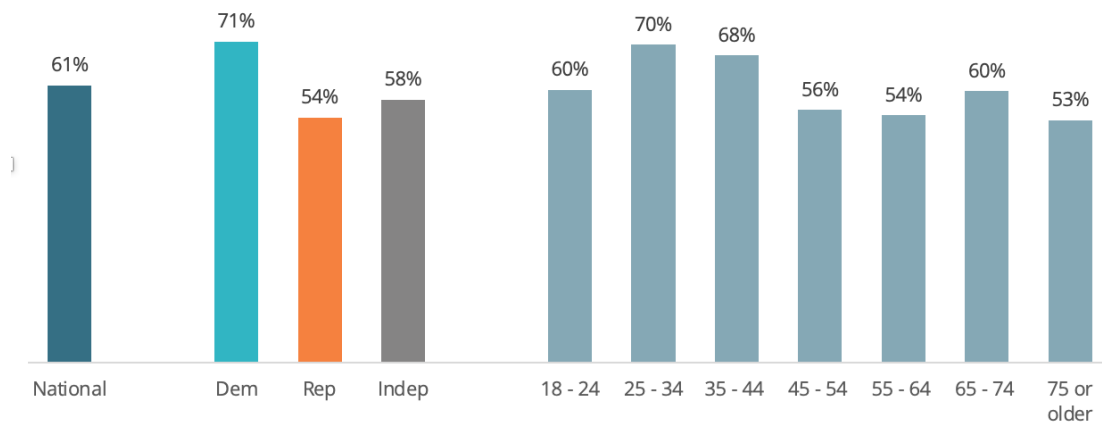
Have you ever discussed the health effects of climate change with a doctor or other health care provider? 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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Over Half of Americans Interested in Learning Health Protection from Climate Change Effects. Survey question:

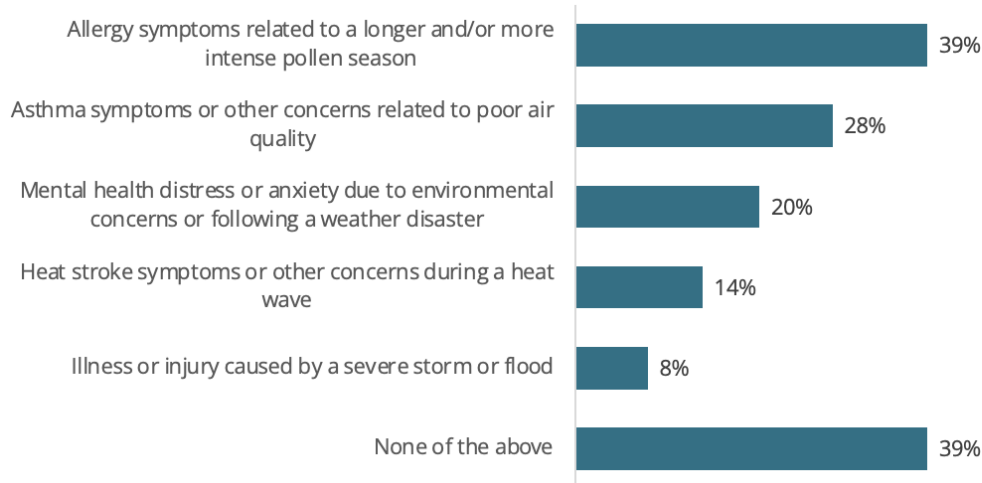
Climate change effects such as poor air quality, extreme heat, and severe storms can impact people’s health resulting in respiratory illness, heat stroke, and mental health issues. Do you want to learn about how to protect your health from poor air quality, extreme heat or severe storms? “Yes”. 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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Whether they realize it or not, significant numbers of Americans are already visiting the doctor for reasons that can be connected to a changing climate. Nearly 2 in 5 (39%) of Americans have or have known someone who has visited a doctor for allergy symptoms related to a longer and/or more intense pollen season, over a quarter (28%) due to asthma symptoms or other concerns related to poor air quality, and fully one fifth (20%) due to environmentally-related mental distress or anxiety.

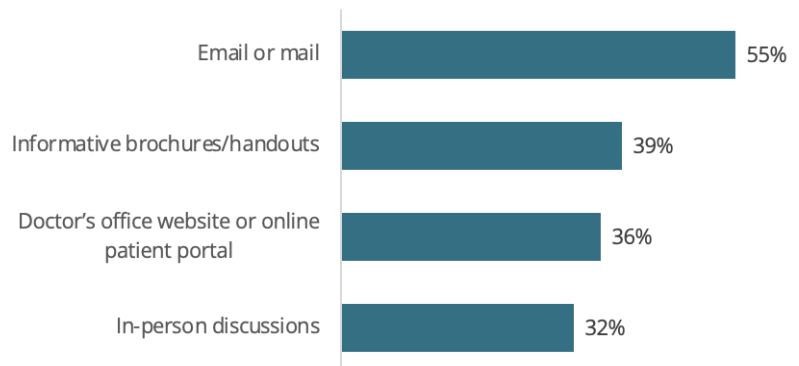
Americans Report Environmental Health Reasons for Doctor Visits. Survey question: Have you or someone you know ever visited the doctor for any of the following?. 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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And, there are a variety of ways health professionals and providers can provide information and guidance to Americans on climate and health. Survey respondents reported interest in receiving information via email or mail (55%), informative brochures/handouts (39%), doctor’s office website or online patient portal (36%), and in-person discussions (32%).

Preferred Methods for Receiving Climate Information from Healthcare Providers. Survey question: How would you like to receive information from your healthcare provider about poor air quality, extreme heat or severe storms? 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.

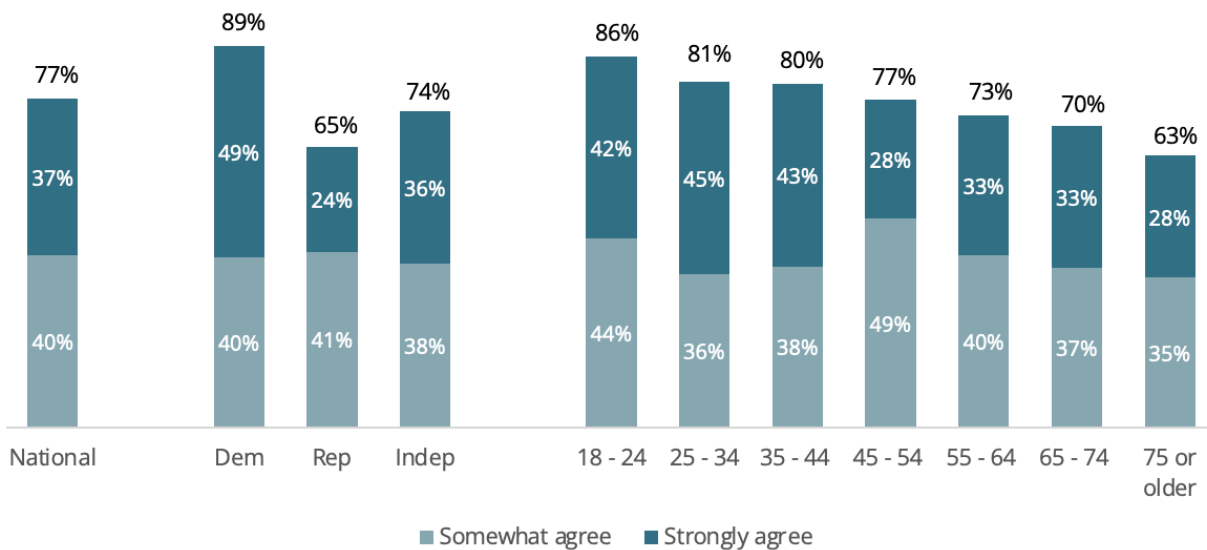


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How do Americans View Fairness and Equity in Climate Change Impacts?

ecoAmerica’s survey reveals that a majority of Americans (77%, 37% strongly) believe it’s unfair that younger people face greater impacts from climate change, such as extreme heat, severe storms, and poor air quality, compared to older people. This sentiment holds across political affiliations and age groups. Specifically, 89% of Democrats, 65% of Republicans, and 74% of Independents find this disparity unfair. Strong agreement (>80%) is observed among younger age groups, with overall consensus persisting across all ages in strong majorities.

Americans Agree: Unfair for Young People to Face Disproportionate Climate Impact. Survey question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. “It’s not fair that young people will live with more extreme heat, severe storms, or poor air quality than older people”? 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.

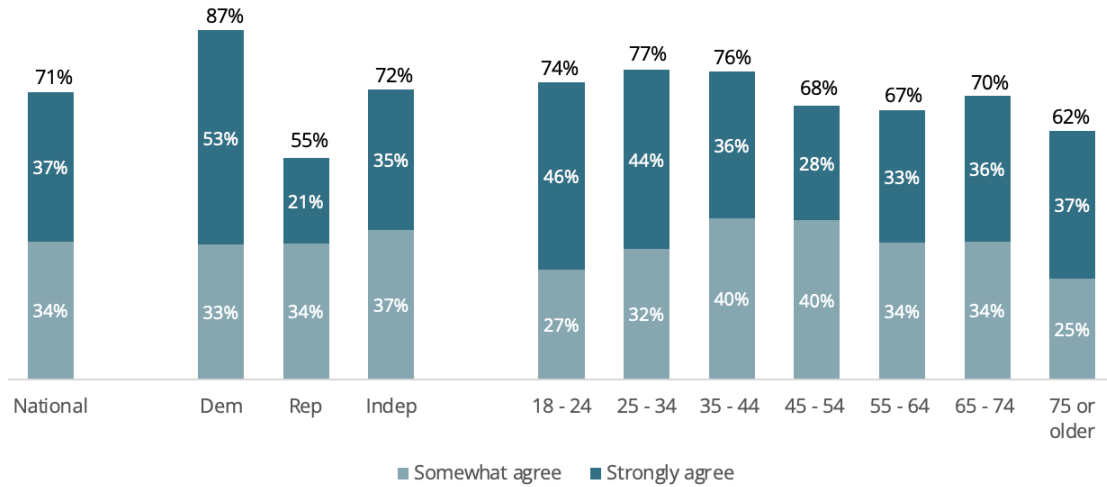


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Moreover, most Americans (71%) agree it’s unfair that lower-income people are more impacted by extreme heat, severe storms, or poor air quality than wealthy people. This consensus spans party lines and age groups. 87% of Democrats, 55% of Republicans, and 72% of Independents find the economic disparity inherent in climate change impacts unfair. Similarly, most Americans (>60%) across all ages recognize the unfair climate change impacts on lower-income individuals.

Americans Agree: Unfair for Lower-Income People to Face Disproportionate Climate Impact.

Survey question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. "It's not fair that lower-income people are often more impacted by extreme heat, severe storms, or poor air quality than wealthy people." 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.

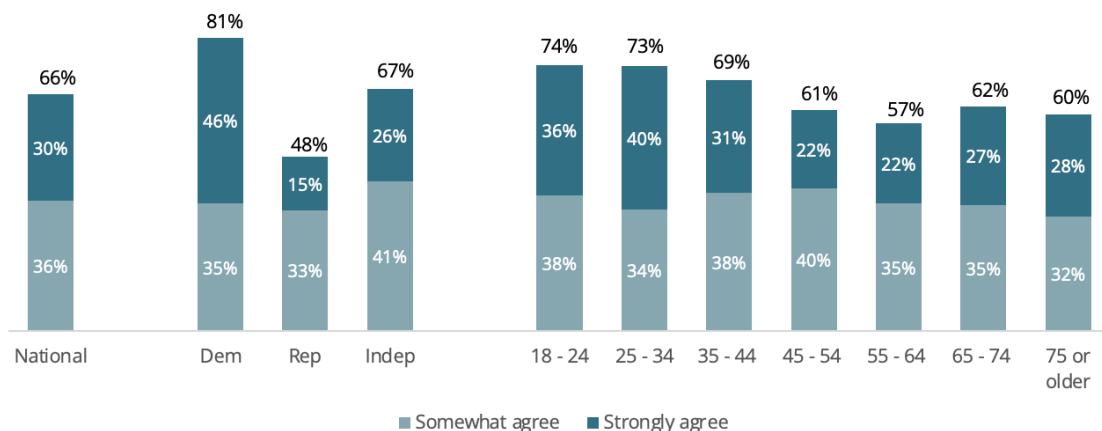


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Furthermore, most Americans (66%) agree it's unfair that Black, Indigenous, and people of color are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts compared to White Americans. Across party lines, a majority of Democrats (81%) and Independents (67%) agree, but only less than half of Republicans (48%) agree it is unfair. Similarly, overall agreement (>55%) persists across age groups; however, higher percentages of people under 45 years of age recognize this injustice compared to those ages 45 and older. These findings underscore the need for further education and awareness to illuminate the racial injustices inherent in climate change impacts, particularly emphasizing the disproportionate burden on communities of color and the increasingly intertwined justice implications.

American Sentiment on Fairness of Climate Impacts on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

Survey question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. "It's not fair that Black, Indigenous, and people of color are often more impacted by extreme heat, severe storms, or poor air quality than white people." 1,006 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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Conclusion: A Critical Opportunity for Health Leadership on Climate Actions

ecoAmerica's American Climate Perspectives Survey highlights broad public awareness of the health impacts of climate change and trust in healthcare professionals as key information sources and guides. With record-breaking temperatures and extreme weather events increasingly threatening people's health, the health sector, and health professionals in particular, possess the wherewithal and permission to advance efforts — locally, regionally, and nationally — to lead in educating and guiding all Americans to understand and care for their health in response. Equally essential is for the health sector and professionals to elevate their roles in advocating for policies that alleviate and ameliorate the disproportionate burden of climate impacts on vulnerable populations by promoting inclusion and equitable climate solutions that safeguard health and secure a thriving future for all.

Full data is available in the accompanying [toplines](#).

Acknowledgments

This research and report are brought to you by ecoAmerica. ecoAmerica is moving society toward climate solutions by empowering trusted national health, faith, and civic institutions and their millions of stakeholders across America to visibly act and advocate. Special thanks to the National Association of Community Health Centers for their valuable review and support in facilitating this report's success.

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Methodology

ecoAmerica designed and administered this survey, which was conducted online on February 26-27, 2024, using Survey Monkey. The survey yielded a total of 1,006 complete adult responses and used the Census Bureau's American Community Survey to weigh the national general population and reflect the demographic composition of the US. The sample was drawn from an online panel, and the respondents were screened to ensure that they were over the age of 18. The margin of error for the sample is +/-3%. In interpreting the survey results, it is important to note that all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling errors. Thus, the results of a survey may differ from the results that would be obtained if the entire population were interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends upon both the total number of respondents in the survey and the percentage distribution of the responses to a particular question. For example, if 50% of the respondents in a sample of 1,006 respondents answered, "Yes" to a particular question, we can be 95% confident that the true percentage would fall within 3 points or range from 47% to 53%.

Suggested Citation

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