

GETTING STARTED WITH CLIMATE SOLUTIONS:

A GUIDE FOR NURSES



Dear Colleagues,

Nurses have a long history of protecting health, inside and outside hospital walls. We have successfully led campaigns against tobacco use and lead contamination to promote healthier patients and communities. Making the world a healthier place is what nurses do – and now our world is faced with a new challenge: climate change.

Climate change is profoundly impacting the health of the public and the environments in which we live, from exposure to toxic air pollution that threatens cardiac and respiratory health to threats to our food and water supplies. Across the country, we are already seeing increases in the frequency and severity of droughts, threats of vector-borne disease outbreaks, and mental health impacts from community displacement and social disruption. Changing weather patterns and warmer temperatures are threatening the fundamental determinants of health and the health of our most vulnerable populations – children, the elderly, and those with chronic illnesses like asthma. Climate change exacerbates health inequities already experienced by communities of color, indigenous populations, and low-income communities. Coastal and riverbank communities are also at higher risk from immediate devastating effects of flooding, and face challenges in the weeks following as they try to recover.

The health impacts of climate change demand bold and immediate action. By addressing climate change now, we have the opportunity to significantly improve public health. As trusted health professionals, nurses are urgently needed to act and advocate for solutions. In fact, nurses have a moral and professional responsibility to ensure that health concerns, such as climate change, are addressed to prevent harm.

This is why the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments and Climate for Health are calling on nurses to join others in taking action on climate change on behalf of the patients and communities we serve. We are committed to providing nurses with the tools and resources needed, including this guide, to get involved and be part of the solution.

Sincerely,



Katie Huffling
Executive Director
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments



Bob Perkowitz
President
ecoAmerica

ANHE is a partner with ecoAmerica's Climate for Health program.

LET'S GET STARTED

There are two main ways you can elevate your climate leadership: 1) **Reduce your climate impact**, and 2) **Advocate and inspire others to act**. Below is guidance on how you can do both.

Have a Healthier Impact on Climate

1. **Use energy efficiently, and when possible, use renewable energy.** Take steps to conserve energy in your home, workplaces, and practice settings. Set your thermostats to 65° in winter and 78° in summer. Turn off lights in vacant rooms, utilize natural lighting, and unplug appliances or electronics when not in use.
2. **Increase active modes of transportation.** Carpool, bike, walk, or take public transportation more often, and encourage others to do the same. Active transportation benefits the climate and our health.
3. **Consume in climate-friendly ways.** Promote recycling and reduce waste in healthcare facilities, academic institutions, homes, and communities. Purchase climate friendly paper and cleaning supplies when available and support a sustainable food system by reducing meat consumption and purchasing local organic foods. Start at home, and inspire others to join you.



Become an Inspiring Health and Climate Advocate

Nurses can have the greatest impact by lending our voices and leadership to advocating for climate solutions. Whether you are a seasoned advocate or just getting started, you have access to a comprehensive set of free resources to support your climate leadership, listed on the following page. Advocacy includes a spectrum of activities. You can:

- 1. Increase your climate literacy** on how climate change impacts health, the solutions available, and how solutions benefit health. Participate in trainings, conferences, and webinars focused on climate related topics.
- 2. Relate climate to health.** Talk to others about how climate change affects health. Connect symptoms to climate change, offer ways to protect health, and encourage patients, clients, friends, and family to take steps to improve their own health and the health of their communities.
- 3. Elevate your voice within your professional community.** Encourage other nurses and health professionals to join you in advocacy. Share successes and best practices and collaborate to increase impact. Present or facilitate educational forums. Promote climate-friendly practices, and elevate the importance of climate in your nursing associations and healthcare institutions. Nurses can also be leaders within their facilities by advocating for reduced energy usage and moving away from polluting fossil fuels, leading to decreased energy costs while improving community health.
- 4. Be vocal, model leaders within your community.** Educate local leaders and collaborate on solutions. Help connect climate with personal, family, and public health. Integrate climate and health in local and state programs and policies. Write to your local paper explaining what you are doing and the reasons why.
- 5. Take your climate leadership national.** Share information on social media. Be a media spokesperson, and pen op-eds. Join climate events and collaborate with climate advocates to inspire regional and national action.

“We cannot deny the inherent connection between climate change and health, and this issue deserves our steady attention because safe environments don’t only protect lives, but they are a significant part of a just and safe society. It is incumbent upon each us to pay attention.”

— Dian Palmer, Chairperson of the SEIU National Nurse Alliance

Resources

[ANHE](#) and [Climate for Health](#) have a multitude of tools and resources to elevate your climate leadership, including:

- » ANHE's 2017 report, [Climate Change, Health, and Nursing: A Call to Action](#).
- » A [video](#) explaining why ANHE and nurses are leading on climate solutions.
- » [Let's Talk Health and Climate](#), communications guidance for health professionals to learn how to effectively talk about climate change.
- » [Mental Health and Our Changing Climate](#), a comprehensive report discussing the range of mental health impacts and implications.
- » ANHE's [Climate and Health Toolkit](#), with resources and ideas on how nurses can take action.
- » [Let's Lead on Climate](#), best practices with tips and ideas from other nurses who have successfully implemented initiatives and engaged communities and practice settings in promoting sustainable environments.
- » These resources can be found on ANHE's website at [envirn.org](#), and on Climate for Health's website at [climateforhealth.org](#).



— Anabell Castro Thompson, MSN, APRN, ANP-C, FAAN, President, National Association of Hispanic Nurses, speaking at ecoAmerica's American Climate Leadership Summit on climate change and social justice.