

# **The climate crisis and health: Evidence-based guidance on effective messaging**

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Mailman School of Public Health  
Columbia University



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## SPECIAL REPORT

# Global Warming of 1.5 °C

An IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty. The translations of the SPM and other material can be downloaded from this [link](#)

*" Pour ce qui est de l'avenir, il ne s'agit pas de le prévoir, mais de le rendre possible. " – Antoine de Saint Exupéry, Citadelle, 1948*



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# Climate change is a health emergency.

Act on climate to protect our health.

Visit [climatehealthemergency.org](https://climatehealthemergency.org)



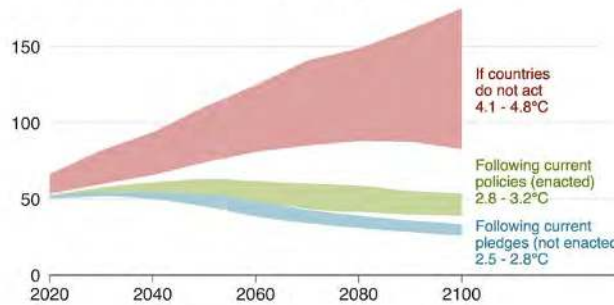
CLIMATE AND  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE

# Most Americans understand that climate change is happening.

However, they see it as a distant threat...

in time

How much worse will the problem get?  
Emissions\* and expected warming by 2100



in space



in species



# Global Warming's Six Americas: December 2020



**Alarmed**

26%



**Concerned**

29%



**Cautious**

19%



**Disengaged**

6%



**Doubtful**

12%



**Dismissive**

8%



Highest Belief in Global Warming  
Most Concerned  
Most Motivated

Lowest Belief in Global Warming  
Least Concerned  
Least Motivated

The essential truth about climate change  
in ten words:

It's real.

It's us.

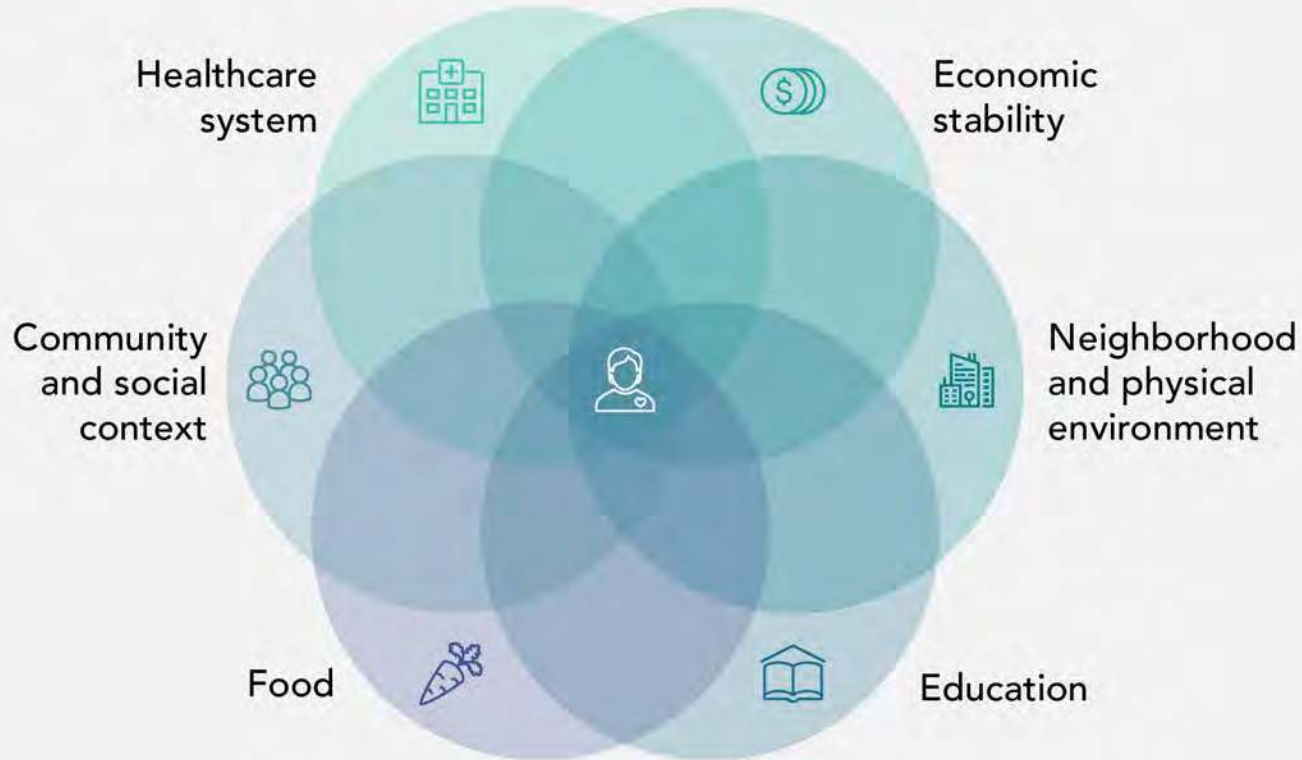
Experts agree.

It's serious.

There's hope.



# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



A stable climate is the most fundamental determinant of health

A fundamental insight from behavioral economics:

People tend to be reluctant to pay today for benefits in the future.\*

\*This is especially true of policymakers and CEOs.

*A focus on health may be the key to solving the behavioral economic dilemma inherent in climate change solutions.*

The most important policy actions needed to limit global warming (i.e., decarbonization) also deliver a range of health and economic benefits beyond limiting global warming—and they do so quickly, and locally.

**Climate solutions are health solutions—fast acting health solutions that benefit the very people who implement them.**

# A fundamental insight from psychology:

The odds of taking protective action are maximized when decision-makers see that:

- Failure to act is risky (perceived risk)
- An alternative action is more attractive (response efficacy)
- They are capable of taking the alternative action (self-efficacy and collective-efficacy)

*Can we share what we know about climate and health with decision-makers so that they see three things in climate solutions?*





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## Effectively sharing what we know: An evidence-based heuristic



**Simple clear  
messages**



**repeated  
often**



**by a variety  
of trusted  
voices**



# Simple Clear Messages

1

The less you say, the more you are heard

2

Say the things that have the most value to your audience

3

Use audience research to determine what has the most value





# Repeated Often

1

Repetition is the mother of learning, liking & trust

2

Adapt, elaborate, but most importantly, deliver your messages early & often

3

Reinforce with visual and verbal images (i.e., metaphors)





# By a Variety of Trusted Sources

1

Determine who is most trusted.

2

Ask those messengers to convey your message — and make it easy for them to do so

3

Ideally, the audience will start repeating your message to their friends, family & colleagues





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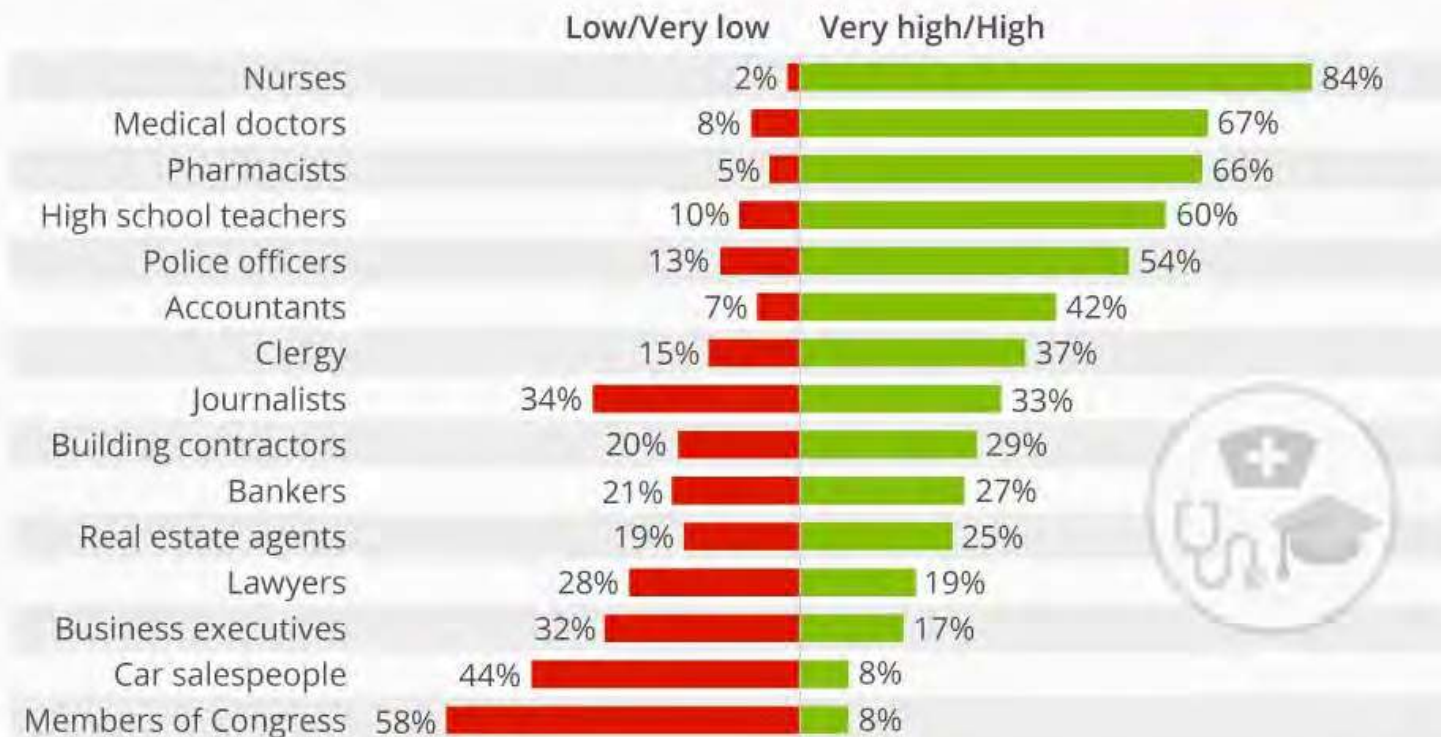
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# America's Most & Least Trusted Professions

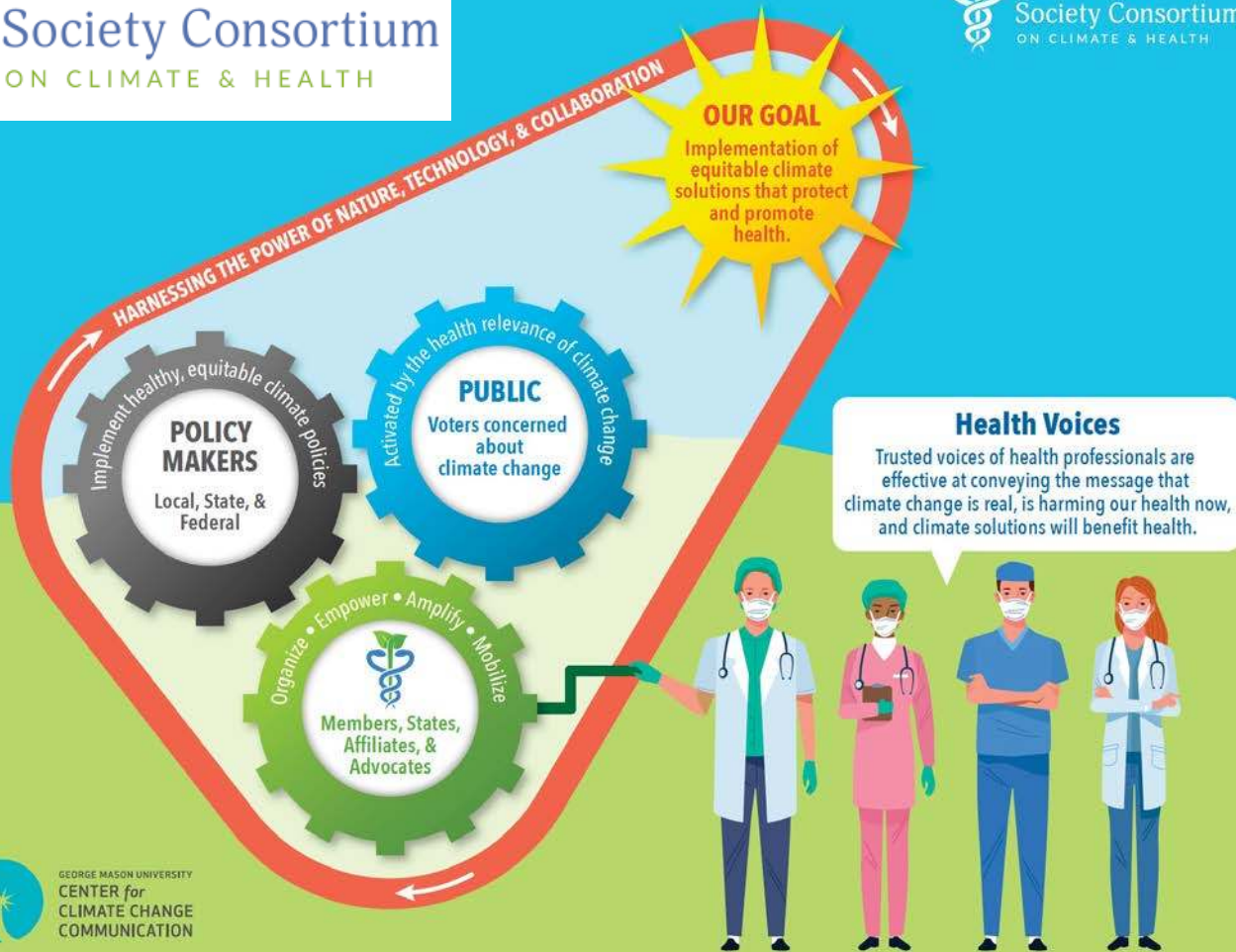
Rating of selected U.S. professions in terms of honesty and ethical standards in 2018



@StatistaCharts

n=1,025 U.S. adults

Source: Gallup



## Our members:

- 32 medical societies
- 14 state groups
- 50+ partners

## Our strategic pillars:

- organizing
- empowering
- mobilizing
- amplifying

# **MEDICAL ALERT!** Climate Change Is Harming Our Health



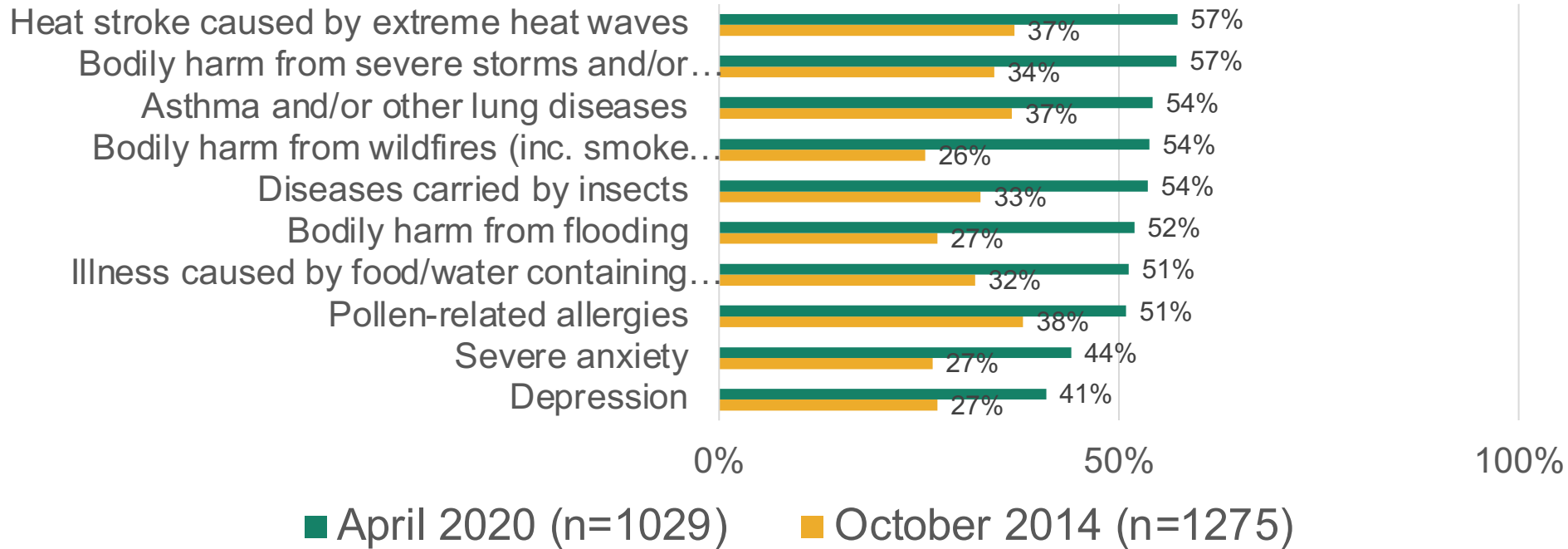
## **Key Messages:**

- 1. There is a scientific consensus about human-caused climate change.**
- 2. In communities across the nation, climate change is harming our health now.**
- 3. The health of any American can be harmed by climate change, but some of us face greater risk than others.**
- 4. Unless we take concerted action, these harms to our health are going to get much worse.**
- 5. The most important action we can take to protect our health is to reduce heat-trapping pollution by reducing energy waste and accelerating the transition to clean renewable energy.**



# Over the past six years there has been a large increase in the number of Americans who see climate change as becoming a danger to health

% of Americans who think each condition will become more common over the next 10 years as a result of global warming



# Essential truths about climate and health:

## Failure to act is harming our health (perceived risk)

- Our health is already being harmed by climate change, and it's going to get much worse unless we take action
- Some groups are being hurt first and worst.

## Climate solutions are health solutions (response efficacy)

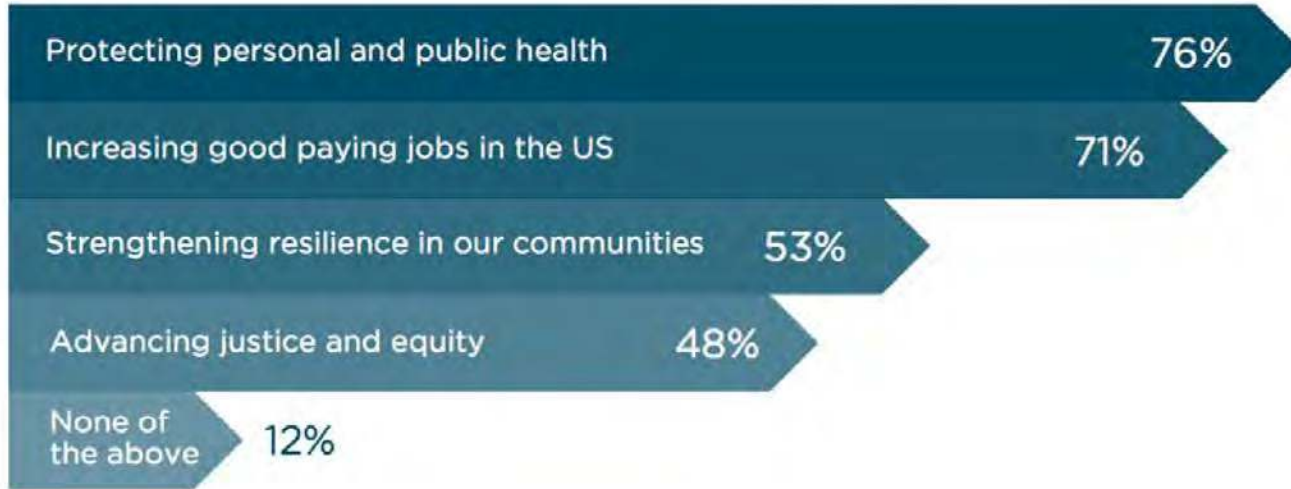
- Using cleaner forms of energy such as solar and wind will give us cleaner air & water, better health, more jobs, & reduce the pollution that cause climate change
- The sooner we do this, the sooner we will benefit.

## We can make this happen, and soon (self/collective-efficacy)

- Most Americans agree that we want health communities and a healthy climate, and many of us are taking action.
- Join me in telling our government officials to make healthy communities and a healthy climate a top priority.

## The majority of Americans support climate change solutions that protect health

Survey question: "Would you support climate solutions if they benefited any of the following? (Please select all that apply)." 1,029 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.





Bernard Lown



James Muller



Eric Chivian



Herb Abrams



Evgeny Chazov



Mikhail Kuzin



Leonid Illyin



In 1980, seven American and Soviet physicians established the *International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War*. In 1985 IPPNW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its central role in helping to open arms control discussions between the U.S. and the USSR.

Their message: A nuclear war would destroy civilization and might extinguish human life.



”Their work commands great respect. For what they say and what they do is prompted by accurate knowledge and a passionate desire to warn humanity about the danger looming over it. In light of their arguments and the strictly scientific data they possess, there seems to be no room left for politicking. And no serious politician has the right to disregard their conclusions.”

Mikhail Gorbachev (1987)



"I want to thank you [IPPNW] for your great contribution to preventing nuclear war. Without it and other effective antinuclear initiatives this [INF] Treaty would probably have been impossible."

Mikhail Gorbachev (1993)



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