



Vermont Climate and Health Alliance

Medical and Health Professionals Calling for Change

February 14, 2022

Governor Scott, Lt. Governor Gray, Speaker Krowinski, Senate President Pro Tempore Balint, and Legislative Leaders:

The early months of the COVID pandemic underscored the lessons of ignoring scientific consensus. The lack of a coordinated federal government response is estimated to have cost *at least* tens of thousands of lives in 2020 alone.[1] As Vermont health professionals, we are grateful for your outstanding leadership on this on-going public health emergency.

The [Vermont Climate and Health Alliance](#) is a network of health professionals who are extremely concerned about the health crisis that is arising from humanity's continued reliance on fossil fuels. Every year, the scientific community warns in ever starker terms that the window for action is closing rapidly. The unprecedented heat waves, massive fires, and intense storms we experienced last summer in North America yet again underscore the validity of the climate science. We strongly urge you to undertake immediate, dramatic, and durable action to protect Vermont's children and communities from the devastating health impacts of a warming world. Time is of the essence.

Like our neighboring states, the transportation sector is the leading source of carbon pollution in Vermont. The time has come to adopt a comprehensive approach to transportation that will protect the health and well-being of all Vermont residents from vehicular pollutants, long known to cause severe respiratory and cardiovascular disease. Fossil fuel-powered automobiles, buses and trucks release pollutants that exacerbate respiratory and cardiovascular disease including asthma, multiple lung diseases, heart disease and many forms of cancer. The carbon pollution that drives climate change creates additional extremely concerning health impacts. We must develop a mechanism for an ongoing and sustainable funding stream to address this challenge, and to ensure long-term equitable public health and job growth for all Vermonters.

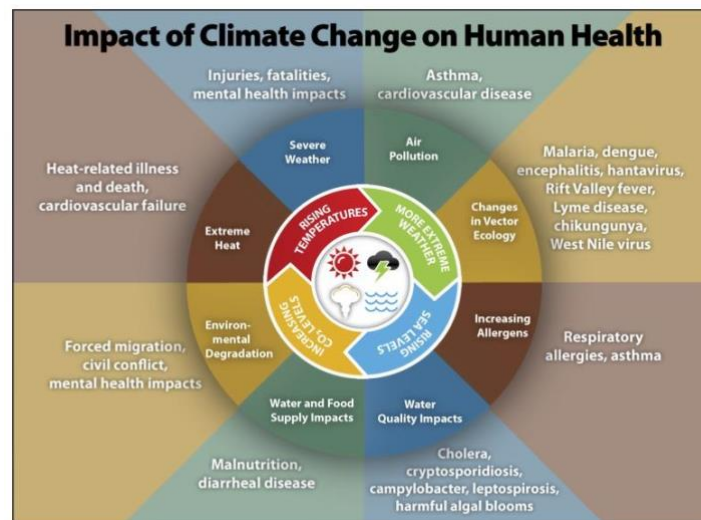
We urge you to adopt aggressive policies to equitably accelerate:

- the adoption of electric vehicles of all types (including electric bikes), along with a commensurate increase in charging infrastructure.
- the adoption of electric buses for public transit and school transportation.
- the use of public transit.
- street planning and construction that supports and promotes biking and walking.
- use of federal funding allocated to Vermont for transportation in a manner that aggressively reduces transportation pollution.
- engagement with neighboring states in developing and adopting a multi-state solution that leverages Vermont's economic power by creating and implementing a new regional approach to our shared transportation challenges, such as the Transportation Climate Initiative.

Transportation pollution is an overwhelming environmental, health and equity issue that disproportionately burden the nation’s most vulnerable residents. In its annual “State of the Air” report, the American Lung Association found that “*despite some nationwide progress on cleaning up air pollution, more than 40% of Americans — more than 135 million people — are living in places with unhealthy levels of ozone or particle pollution. The burden of living with unhealthy air is not shared equally. People of color are more than three times more likely to be breathing the most polluted air than white people.*”[2]

The World Health Organization declared climate change to be “*the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century.*” The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that human populations are already experiencing harm to their health from climate change and predicts that the effects will continue to climb rapidly.[3] The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change states that climate change has “*already produced considerable shifts in the underlying social and environmental determinants of health.*” In February of 2021, a study from Harvard’s TH Chan School of Public Health backed these assertions in startling fashion.[4] The team found that more than 8 million people worldwide died in 2018 from fossil fuel pollution (almost equivalent to the population of New York City).

Experts in public health policy focus on the social determinants of health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define social determinants as the “*conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health and quality-of-life-risks and outcomes.*” As health care professionals, we want to make sure you understand that climate change is the single most powerful and overarching detrimental driver undermining all social determinants of health. One has only to look at the CDC diagram below depicting the impacts of climate change on human health to understand why we make that assertion.



For everyone’s sake - especially those in overburdened and underserved communities - we strongly urge you to take the actions described above.

[1] “[Dying in a Leadership Vacuum](#)”, New England Journal of Medicine, 10/8/20
 [2] [2021 State of the Air Report](#), American Lung Association.
 [3] [Human Health: Impacts, Adaptation and Co-Benefits](#), IPCC, 3/2020
 [4] “[Fossil Fuel Air Pollution Responsible for 1-in-5 Deaths Worldwide](#)”, Harvard School of Public Health, 2/9/21