



Vermont Climate and Health Alliance

Medical and Health Professionals Calling for Change

August 12, 2021

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

The early months of the COVID-19 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 medical and health professionals, we are grateful for your science-driven response, which assuredly saved many lives. Thank you for your outstanding leadership on this public health emergency.

The Vermont Climate and Health Alliance is a network of Vermont health professionals who are highly concerned about a less conspicuous, but far more menacing and sustained health crisis resulting from humanity's continued reliance on fossil fuels. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change continually warns that the window for action is closing rapidly.[2] The unprecedented heat wave and forest fires we are currently experiencing in North America 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.

Since the transportation sector is the leading source of carbon pollution in Vermont, we urge you to:

- Join Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Washington DC in signing the Transportation and Climate Initiative program (TCI-P) Memorandum of Understanding.
- Adopt policies that will dramatically accelerate the electrification and expansion of public transit.
- Adopt policies that support active transportation, including walk/bike infrastructure.
- Adopt policies that will dramatically accelerate adoption of electric vehicles, including building out charging infrastructure.

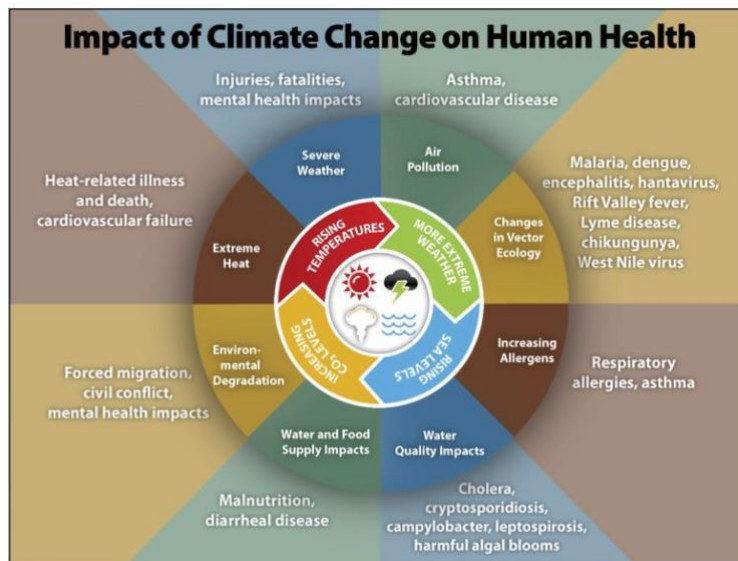
The TCI-Program ("TCI-P") represents a pivotal regional approach that will protect the health and well-being of Vermont residents from vehicular pollutants, long known to cause severe respiratory and cardiovascular disease, and also reduce the state's primary source of carbon pollution and global warming.[3] Fossil fuel-powered automobiles, buses and trucks release pollutants that exacerbate respiratory and cardiovascular disease including asthma, various lung diseases, heart disease and many forms of cancer. TCI-P will provide an ongoing funding stream to help promote short- and long-term equitable public health and job growth for all Vermonters. Your administration will be the first to decide how to allocate the proceeds from TCI-P, and must strive to maximize equitable outcomes.

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 (ALA) 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.”[4]

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. 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, a study from Harvard’s TH Chan School of Public Health backed these assertions in startling fashion.[5] It 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 professionals, we want to make sure you see 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 depicting the impacts of climate change on human health to understand why we make that assertion. Hurricane Irene and recent heat waves highlighted for Vermont what is happening across the U.S. – vulnerable communities are hit first by, and recover the slowest to, the ravages of climate change.



New policies need to be implemented that will reduce pollution, support the buildout of safe and clean public transit, and create new economic opportunity. Each of these objectives must vigorously consider the intersections with historically 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] [Human Health: Impacts, Adaptation and Co-Benefits](#), IPCC, 3/2020
 [3] [TRECH Research Project Update on Health Benefits of TCI](#), Harvard School of Public Health, 2/25/21
 [4] [2021 State of the Air Report](#), American Lung Association.
 [5] “[Fossil Fuel Air Pollution Responsible for 1-in-5 Deaths Worldwide](#)”, Harvard School of Public Health, 2/9/21