

# A Physician's Response to Climate Change

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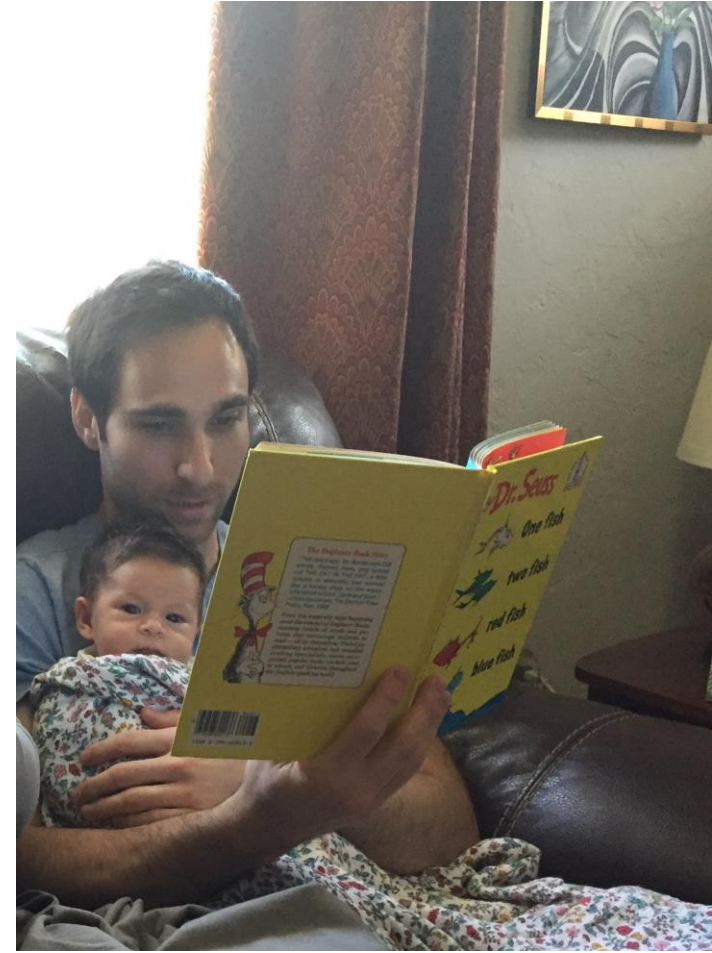
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The Medical  
Society Consortium

ON CLIMATE & HEALTH

# Disclosures



# Objectives of This Talk

- Summarize what we know on physicians' thoughts on climate change.
- Discuss the Medical Society Consortium + its activities
- Summarize US public thinking about climate change.
- Describe how physicians can contribute to efforts to address climate change. "What can I do?"

# What Do Doctors Think #1

- 3 Surveys of medical societies ('14-'16) -  
(allergists, thoracic surgeons, African American docs)
- Similar results
  - They knew **human caused** climate change real
  - They saw direct relevance of climate change to patient care
  - 70% said is harming their own patients

# What Do Doctors Think #2

- Agreed on areas of harm:
  - air pollution,
  - allergies,
  - injuries of extreme weather events,
  - tick/mosquito diseases
- “Physicians have responsibility to tell public/patients”
- Wanted society involvement; lead on sustainability
- Led to establishment of Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health

# Report Released 2017



- '16: 8 societies met agreed mission—inform public + policymakers on how climate change is harming our health and how climate solutions can improve it.
- '17 grew to 12 societies at launch
- '19 Today Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health = is 25 medical societies with >600,000 members + 35 affiliated public health orgs, with millions of members (heart, lung, social work, psychology)

# Q: What does the Consortium do?

## A: Organize, Empower, Amplify

### 1) Organize

- Bring national medical societies together
- Support state level Affiliates
- Individual advocates program (see docsforclimate.org)

### 2) Empower

- Offer webinars, CME
- Offer resources: Ppts, patient fact sheets, reports
- Clearinghouse for Events
- Annual meeting (May 18-19)–updates, network, strategy

# What does the Consortium do?

## 3) Amplify

- Monthly newsletter with
  - Action Alerts
  - Physician op-eds from around the country
  - Share opportunities and events, resources
  - News updates
- Public relations
  - Over 550 stories in media outlets last year
  - Provide an opportunity share your own story



# Call to Action on Climate, Health, & Equity: A Policy Action Agenda\*

- Declares climate change “public health emergency”
- 10-part agenda, six parts actively benefit health
- Couple focus on health delivery: carbon footprint, resilience
- Protect affected communities- from impacts **and** transitions
- Resources and research
- Endorsed by 130 medical (AMA), nursing (ANA), public health orgs (APHA, APA), health systems with >500 hospitals, schools of academic medical centers

\*[climatehealthaction.org](http://climatehealthaction.org)

# Climate Change is a Health Emergency

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to health America has ever faced

Health risks in the future are dire without urgent action to fight climate change

Our food, water, air, and shelter – what we need for human survival – are under threat

# Two part agenda

- 1) Climate Action for Health
- 2) Health Action for Climate

# Climate Action for Health

1. Strengthen U.S. commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement
2. Transition rapidly away from coal, oil and natural gas to clean, safe, and renewable energy and energy efficiency
3. Emphasize active transportation in the transition to zero-carbon transportation systems
4. Promote healthy, sustainable and resilient farms and food systems, forests, and natural lands (key carbon sinks)
5. Ensure all U.S. residents have access to safe, affordable drinking water and a sustainable water supply
6. Invest in policies that support just transition for workers and communities adversely impacted by climate change and the transition to a low-carbon economy

# Health Action for Climate

- 7. Engage the health sector voice in the call for climate action**
- 8. Incorporate climate solutions into all health care and public health systems**
9. Build resilient communities in the face of climate change

# Equity is needed in climate action

- Everyone threatened by health harms of climate change
- But some are hurt first and worst
  - Climate change exacerbates existing health inequities
  - Communities with history of systemic neglect and environmental racism are in greater danger
- Disproportionate harms to vulnerable
  - Children - pregnant women - low income people - the aged - disabilities and chronic illnesses - some communities of color - indigenous people + tribal communities, outdoor workers

# What about Health Care **Costs** due to Climate Change?

- Know about rising infrastructure costs
- Now, accounting for health costs starting to emerge
- Health cost impact is real/growing\*

\* Liu Y, Saha S, Hoppe Brendalynn, Convertino M. Degrees and dollars- Health costs associated with suboptimal ambient temperature exposure. Science of the Total Environment April 2019.

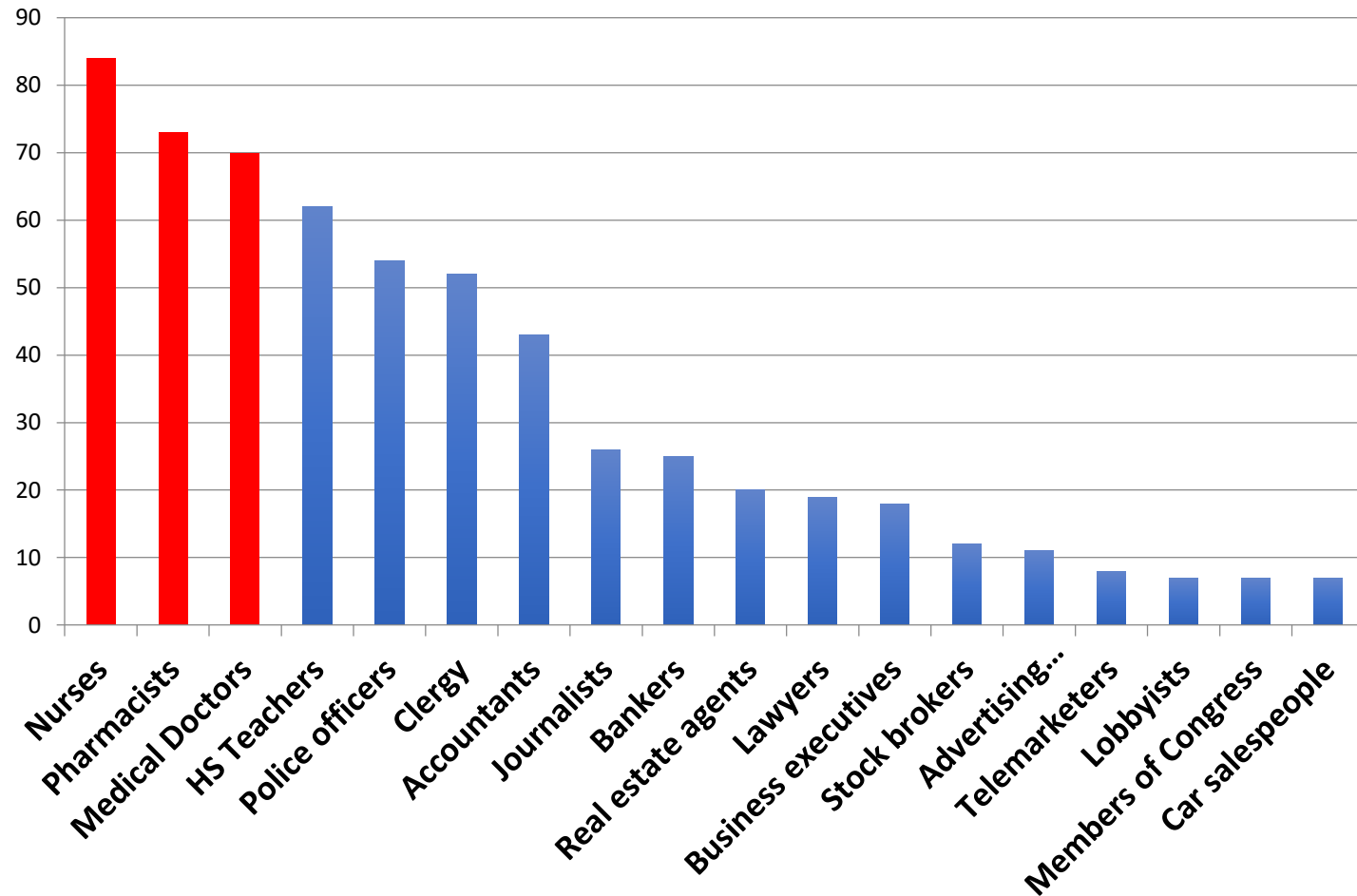
\* Limaye VJ, Max W, Constible J, Knowlton K. Estimating the Health-Related Costs of 10 ClimateSensitive U.S. Events During 2012. GeoHealth. April 2019.

# Our Immediate Goal

To create the greatest potential for rapid adoption of the Policy Action Agenda in communities and states in 2020 and ongoing



# Why Bring the Voices of Physicians?

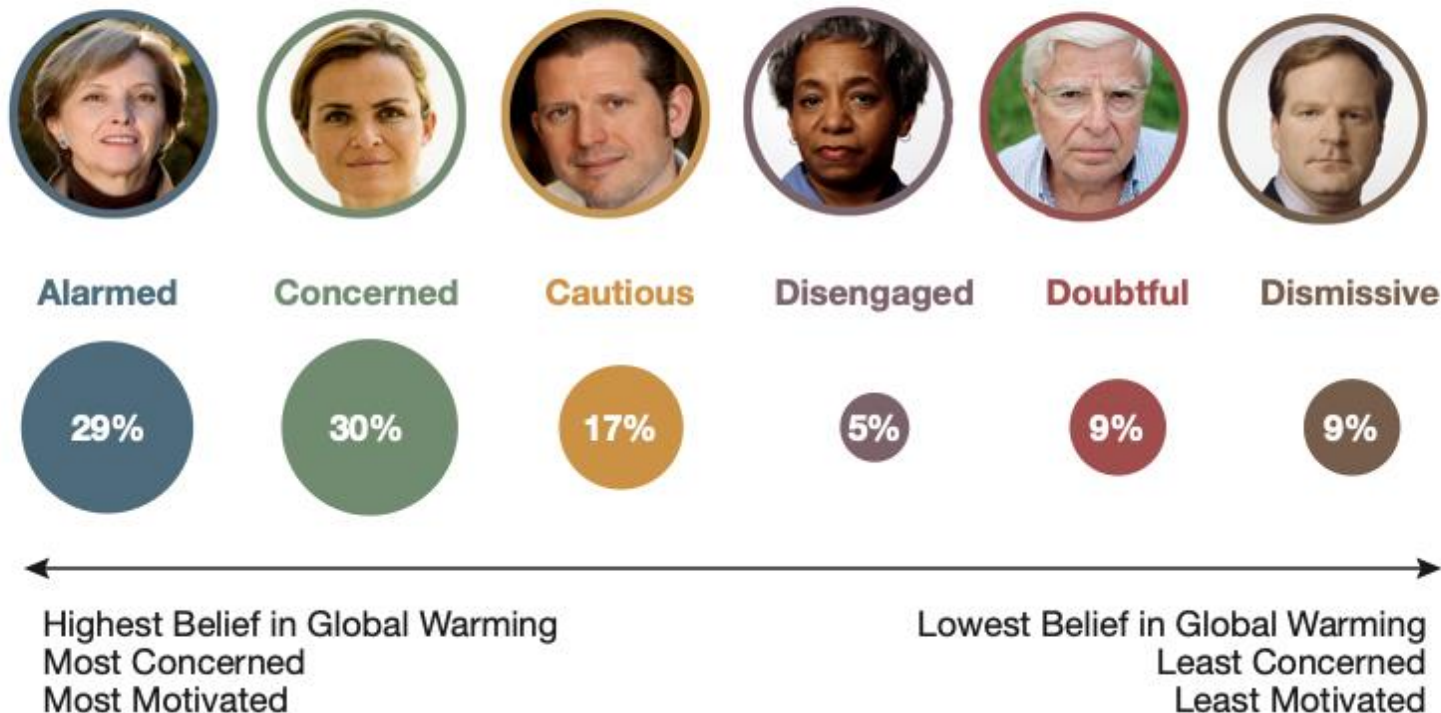


# What is the physicians role?

- The public sees us, above all others but their families and friends, as **trusted messengers**
- We can make clear that fighting climate change has **immediate health & economic benefits**
- Note that **health framing of climate change helps depolarize the issue**, moving conservatives and independents toward climate engagement.....how do we know this?

# How Do Americans Think About Climate Change?

## Global Warming's Six Americas: December 2018

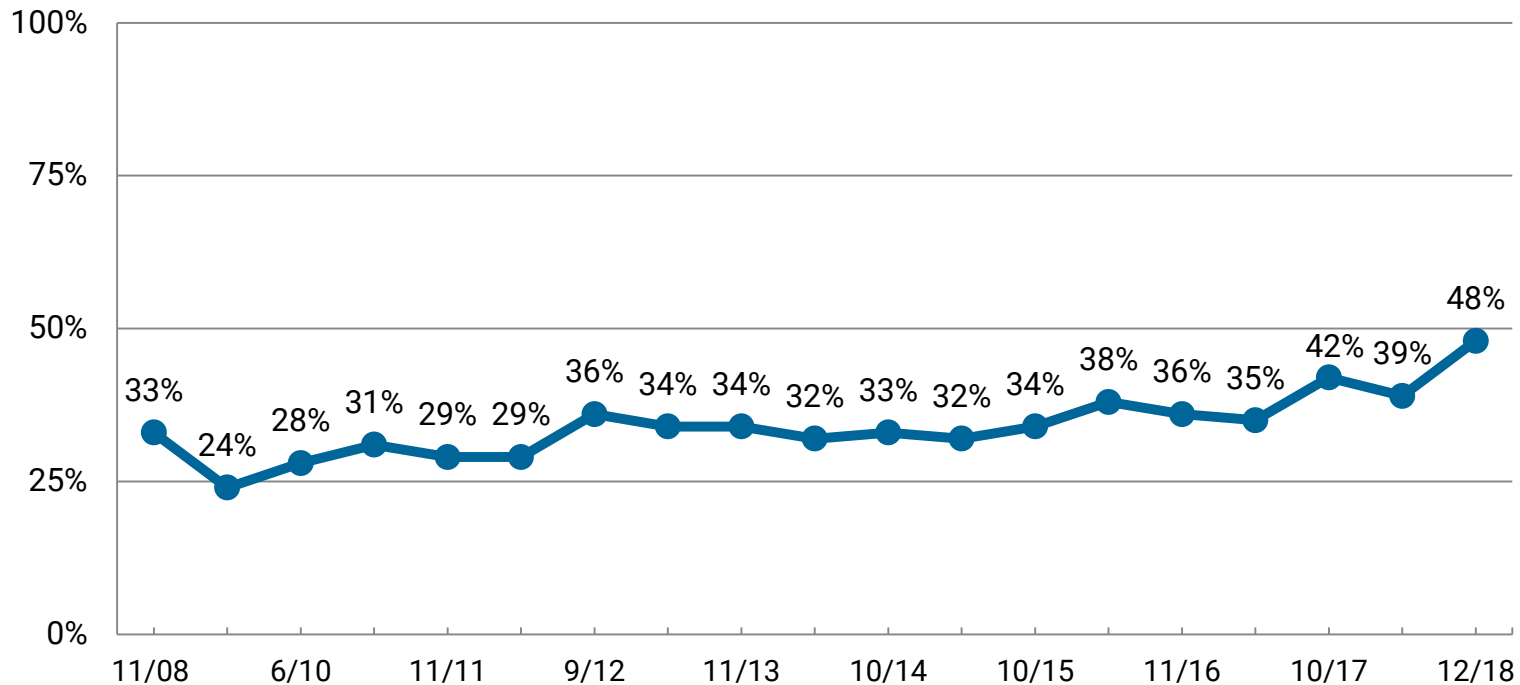


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# Nearly Half of Americans Think People in the U.S. Are Being Harmed “Right Now” by Global Warming



When do you think global warming will start to harm people...?  
December 2018. Base: Americans 18+.



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# The “cautious” need to hear from us

- As they learn more, they become “concerned”
- Two area of information have been shown to be influential:
  1. impact of climate change on their health
  2. the moral imperative of passing on a livable planet to our children and grandchildren
- Doctors can help-inform colleagues, public, policymakers
  - The Consortium can help you figure out how.

# Why physician messengers? more reasons

1. We are used to translating science to the public
2. We are familiar authorities (> climate scientists)
3. We feel we have a responsibility to share what we know
4. Personal physicians are specifically trusted on the topic of climate change\*
5. We care about human health and well being

\*Maibach E, et. al. Do American Understand that Climate Change is Harmful...Annals of Global Health, 2015.

# What is our Advice?

## HELP PATIENTS GET CLIMATE HEALTH SMART!

- Help them protect themselves from the harms of climate change (heat, allergy season, mosquitos/ticks, storms)
- Tell them how climate change is connected to health
- Tell them being energy smart with clean non-polluting energy is also being health smart because it protects them and others
- Time/no time? Put pamphlets in the waiting room.

# What Can You DO In Your own Life?

## EAT, MOVE 4 WELLNESS & SUSTAINABILITY

- Cultivate energy saving habits - Insulation, e-star appliances
- Buy electricity from renewable sources (check your zip code in [Cleanchoiceenergy.com](http://Cleanchoiceenergy.com)) – Go for 100%
- Choose active transport (walk/bike/public transit)-electric car
- Eat less meat, buy locally grown fruits and vegetables
- Avoid disposable water bottles; carry reusable containers



# Remember: The Climate Policies Offer Health Benefits

**Clean energy** creates less soot, less pollution, and healthier air

**Active transportation** (walking, biking, public transportation) is clean and better for your health

**Diets** with more vegetables and less meat are healthier and produce less methane

**Cities** with more trees and cooling greenery absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, transpire, and help protect people from heat

**Buildings** with efficiency use less energy, cleaner air

# What Can You Do With Colleagues?

## BE A VOICE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

- Tell policy makers you want solutions to climate change; ask what they will do about it.
- Share the agenda [climatehealthaction.org](http://climatehealthaction.org)
- Divest/Invest [<https://www.divestinvest.org/>]
- Stay in touch by signing up on our website at [docsforclimate.org](http://docsforclimate.org); get our newsletter

**Annual Meeting: Climate Health Solutions: April 8-10, 2018**



ANNUAL MEETING ABOUT LEARN EDUCATE STATES TAKE ACTION PREPARE NEWS



# Report: Medical Alert! Climate Change is Harming Our Health



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for Climate & Health!**

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# Share a Story

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://states.ms2ch.org>. The browser's address bar shows [test.ms2ch.org/storybank/](https://states.ms2ch.org/storybank/). The website header includes the logo for The Medical Society Consortium (ON CLIMATE & HEALTH) and a navigation menu with links: ANNUAL MEETING, ABOUT, LEARN, EDUCATE, STATES, TAKE ACTION, PREPARE, and NEWS. Social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are also present.

The main content area features a logo for CLIMATE & HEALTH STORYBANK with the tagline "Stories worth sharing". Below this is a prominent blue button with white text that says "SHARE YOUR STORY" and a small green leaf icon.

A video player is embedded on the page. The video title is "Climate Change is Bad for Health – Dr. A...". The video description reads: "Dr. Samantha Ahdoot, highlights some of the ways our changing climate is affecting human health. Some vulnerable populations are particularly at risk, such as our nation's children." Below the description, it states: "Dr. Samantha Ahdoot is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine, and a partner with". The video player shows a woman in a white lab coat and glasses, likely Dr. Samantha Ahdoot, with a play button overlay.

The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the search bar with the text "Type here to search", several application icons (including Chrome, Firefox, and Word), and system tray information indicating 98% battery and the date 9/22/2019 at 8:49 PM.

# Why Will We Succeed?

Research shows that:

- When asked, the public sees health as the single most important reason to care about climate change
- Half the public does not **yet** see climate change as a health issue
- But the connection is easily understood ...  
*if* communicated simply and with examples
- Physicians are perfect messengers for this message
- Simple messages, repeated often, by trusted messengers is the best way to make communication count

**We must succeed because there is no acceptable alternative!**

# Thank You!

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# References

- Parker C. American Family Physician, November 2019.
- National Climate Assessment 2018
- Health 2016. Impact of Climate Change on Health in the United States.
- Lancet Countdown U.S. Policy Brief
- Climatehealthaction.org