

Leading the Charge: Health Professionals in Climate and Health Equity



As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, The Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health (the "Consortium") has been working to grow and diversify the movement of health professionals that are taking action on climate change. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 2.

Mission:

The Consortium mobilizes health professionals to address climate change as a health and equity crisis.

The Consortium effectively organized, empowered, and mobilized health professionals to become powerful climate and health advocates, driving impactful education and advocacy initiatives that prioritize climate, health, and equity. Supported by CCHE-funded activities, the Consortium fostered greater awareness among health professionals, policymakers, community organizations, and the public about the dual reality of climate change as a health threat and climate solutions as a health opportunity. This growing awareness translated into increased public and policymaker support for the solutions outlined in the Consortium's Policy Action Agenda. Additionally, stakeholder groups became better equipped to champion equitable climate solutions. Ultimately, this work built the foundation for healthy, thriving communities. For an overview of the Consortium's CCHE-related work, see their 2022 CCHE theory of change ([slide 14](#)), described in more detail below. Key partners in the Consortium's CCHE-funded work are listed at the end of the document.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

Over the past six years, the Consortium has made significant strides in growing and diversifying the climate and health movement, fostering collective action, and promoting health and equity in climate policy. The health professional community has become significantly more engaged and organized around climate issues. There was an increased demand for the 'health voice' in climate work. The Consortium fielded increasing requests from health practitioners to engage in climate action across all health professions, multiple medical specialties, and regions of the U.S. that span political stripes.

The number of member societies, public and state-based affiliates, and individual advocates has rapidly increased. Since 2019, the total number of member societies grew from 8 to 57, and the total number of affiliates increased to 71 health organizations. The Climate and Health State Network (CHSN), founded with ten members in 2019, now includes 25 state-level groups dedicated to organizing, training, and mobilizing health professionals. The Consortium team directly facilitated

Select Resources and Media

- [To protect our health, tell the truth about the fossil fuel industry](#)
- [Supporting Climate, Health, and Equity under the Farm Bill](#)
- [Medical Groups Announce Policy Agenda and Call to Action on the Climate Health Emergency](#)

the launch of 11 of these groups with support from the CCHE initiative. Individual advocates grew to 7,116. "An amazing amount of requests from people who want to get connected and want to be organizing. It's been exponential growth and so exciting. The climate and health ecosystem is unrecognizable from 2019."

The Consortium has amplified the trusted voices of members and advocates through strategic communications to build public and political will. The Consortium significantly expanded its reach and digital communication presence to meet the needs of a growing movement and to fortify the network's standing as an influential voice for climate and health. With a little over 2,000 followers on social media at the start of the CCHE initiative, the organization's reach grew to 7,624 followers on Twitter, 1,659 followers on LinkedIn, and 4,417 new individuals joining the newsletter since 2019. Last year, as part of the Consortium's annual meeting, 145 advocates, representing 30 states, visited Capitol Hill for 143 meetings with members of Congress. These visits have been made annually since 2018, including virtually from 2020 to 2022. For the past two summers, the Consortium and its communication partner, Burness, hosted a six-part climate and advocacy communications series that trained more than 400 health practitioners. Advocates across the network continued to be published in local, state, and national venues, such as the New York Times, the Hill, the Los Angeles Times, and Newsweek, and continued to be interviewed for major news outlets such as CNN, NPR, Washington Post, New York Times, and USA Today, among others. MedPage Today also offered the Consortium a monthly column called "[Climate Checkup](#)," which featured fresh perspectives on climate and health from Consortium experts and has helped column writers leverage additional opportunities to provide expertise. The inaugural op-ed, written by Executive Director Dr. Lisa Patel, explored the role health professionals should play in holding the oil and gas industry accountable. The Consortium has also launched a new podcast in 2024 to highlight opportunities in climate, health, and equity policy, advocacy, and communications.

The Consortium has recruited and mobilized health professional societies and coalitions at both national and state levels to advance coordinated climate health solutions. Since the launch of the Policy Action Agenda in 2019, the Consortium has convened a diverse coalition of health organizations to coordinate on sign-on letters and policy campaigns more efficiently and to recruit more health professionals into the movement. This coalition included the American Lung Association (ALA), Alliance of Nurses for a Healthy Environment, Climate Psychiatry Alliance, Rx for Climate, EcoAmerica, Occupational Therapists for the Environment, American Public Health Association (APHA), Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), Medical Students for a Sustainable Future, and Health Care Without Harm. In the past two years, the Consortium has led three sign-on letters, including the farm policy recommendations, which were published in the New England Journal of Medicine, the most prestigious and widely read medical journal in the world. The Consortium led six sign-on letter efforts on climate, health, and equity at a federal level in the first two years of the Biden Administration. Sixteen of 43 member societies (37%) have formally endorsed the Call to Action on Climate, Health, and Equity: A Policy Action Agenda.

The Consortium has supported state affiliates to become more diverse and accessible to health professionals of all backgrounds by launching the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Antiracism (DEIA) subcommittee and continuing to train Climate and Health Equity Fellowship (CHEF) fellows. This committee, composed of representatives from State Network and Medical Society leaders, strategized on how to best support state groups in creating organizations that are authentically diverse, accessible, and inclusive and aligning themselves with the coalitions, partner organizations, and campaigns focused on equity and justice. [The Health Professional and Community Collaboration Guide](#) and associated webinars built the capacity of health professionals to effectively collaborate with community groups. The Consortium raised additional funds to support state affiliates in 2023 to grow and deepen their mobilization capacity, prioritizing groups that had concrete plans to collaborate with other organizations and community groups.

The CHEF was the Consortium's premier program designed to equip physicians—particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds in medicine—with comprehensive training in climate and health equity. The fellowship combined didactic and skills-based education with impactful capstone practicums in partnership with community-, state-, regional-, and faith-based organizations, and environmental justice groups. In 2021 during its inaugural Southeast cohort, CHEF attracted over 100 applicants for just six positions. To date, the program has trained over 30 physicians of color, with an additional 12 fellows in the current cohort. Graduates have emerged as leaders, advancing the field through research, media engagement, and education. The program's influence has been further amplified through the launch of the CHEF Alumni Engagement Network (CAEN), which served as a platform for a speaker's bureau, resource-sharing, peer engagement, and professional networking in 22 U.S. states including Hawaii and Alaska. Building on its success, CHEF has introduced the 18-month Policy Experience in Equity, Climate, and Health (PEECH) fellowship, further solidifying its commitment to leadership development in this critical space. The program has also heightened the involvement of organizations like the National Medical Association and other affinity-based medical associations in climate and health equity. Fellows have made

significant contributions by presenting at major conferences and influencing policy resolutions, positioning CHEF as a transformative force in addressing the intersection of climate, health, and equity.

The Consortium has provided strategic resources, training, and support for national and state policy efforts on climate, health, and equity. In 2023, state affiliates expanded education programs, enhanced organizing capacity, and achieved significant legislative and regulatory victories in renewable energy, clean transportation, and environmental justice. The Consortium established new infrastructure to support these efforts, including a monthly peer-learning structure and two working groups focused on climate-smart healthcare and fossil fuel infrastructure. These initiatives facilitated coordinated advocacy efforts and campaign planning for 2024. Regular bi-monthly meetings fostered collaborative learning and state leaders found these new structures highly beneficial. The Fossil Free for Health group coalition received its first grant from the KR Foundation to further collaboration efforts. The Climate and Health State Network has grown to be a thriving community of practice and collaboration with a high level of internal commitment from members.

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **Health professionals are changing the way they partner with and engage communities of color.** They are more intentional in incorporating people of color (POC) into their initiatives and getting involved in their meetings and issues. This effort includes health professionals volunteering their time to support frontline groups, such as helping with grant writing and advocating for cleaner school buses.
- **Kresge’s focus on relationship building and continuous funding is essential.** Many other funders have yet to understand this. Continuous funding is necessary to prevent stagnation. Seed money is critical for helping grassroots organizations get started. Kresge’s approach not only helps open the door for other funders to see its power, but also strengthens groups and advances their work.
- **Nurturing health professionals to prevent burnout is critical.** Current healthcare institution funding is often insufficient; many who have been doing this unpaid for a long time are burning out and need more resources and compensation, especially since most health professionals are still paying off loans in addition to their clinical duties.
- **Shifting from a focus on education to relationship building, advocacy, and environmental justice has been powerful for the Consortium and its impact.** The significant shift towards aligning with environmental justice work initially felt radical. The Consortium successfully united various organizations around shared goals, moving away from isolated efforts. Collective action and learning have become the norm, making it rare to find someone who does not understand the necessity of medical communities aligning with environmental justice.
- **Ripple effects are significant, and movement is happening across the medical world.** Climate action by large and influential medical societies, like the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and American Academy of Family Physicians, has brought other societies into the fold. The American Medical Association hired a full-time expert to help set agendas around supporting climate science. “We shifted from educating to relationship building and getting health professionals comfortable with the idea that advocacy is a necessary part of what they do.”

Looking Ahead

In collaboration with seven major national organizations, the Consortium is planning a shared convention for climate, health, and equity in 2025. These organizations include the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), PSR, APHA, Kaiser Permanente, EcoAmerica, Planetary Health Alliance, and ALA. This initiative represents an important exercise in movement and coalition-building to fill the void left by the lack of federal leadership on this front, given a new presidential administration. The Consortium has built a shared agenda for policy, advocacy, and communications to train the network and present a united front to protect existing rules and advance more policies at local and state levels. The Consortium leads this effort, heavily relying on APHA and ALA for policy guidance, NAM for dissemination assistance, and PSR and EcoAmerica for network activation. The Consortium brings deep experience in skills training and communications to strengthen this work, continuing to mobilize more health professionals to engage in policy and advocacy on climate, health, and equity.

While defending and protecting at the federal and institutional levels, there is also a clear necessity to invest even more in base building and organizing at the state and local levels. The climate and health solutions required at the federal level will only be possible with broad, popular, and sustained support. State and local organizing are the most effective tools to build that support and, more critically, to build understanding of and support for paradigm-shifting climate policies with equity at the center. The health voice has the power to broaden the coalition of support for climate solutions, and relationship-building between health professional organizations and environmental justice organizations results in transformational alliances and builds power capable of securing concrete climate and health policy advances.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
Alliance of Nurses for a Health Environment	Health Partner
American Lung Association	Health Partner
American Medical Association	Health Partner
American Public Health Association	Health Partner
Healthcare Without Harm	Health Partner
National Association of Community Health Centers	Health Partner
National Medical Association	Health Partner
Physicians for Social Responsibility	Health Partner