

# Equipping the Public Health Community to Advance Climate Justice



## Mission:

*Improve the health of the public and achieve equity in health status.*

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, the American Public Health Association (APHA) has been working to ensure that the nation addresses climate change in ways that improve public health and health equity, creating the healthiest nation in one generation. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 2.

Under the CCHE initiative, one of APHA's most significant accomplishments has been its substantial influence on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [BRACE framework](#) (Building Resilience Against Climate Effects), which helps health officials develop strategies to prepare for and respond to the health impacts of climate change. CDC has partnered with APHA to create the [Climate Change and Health Playbook: Adaptation Planning for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#). The revised framework supports the work of state, local, territorial and tribal health organizations across the nation in embedding justice, equity, diversity and inclusion into their climate and resilience initiatives, programs and operations. APHA has also provided extensive guidance and resources to public health professionals nationwide, supporting health departments and affiliated public health associations. This guidance has enhanced community engagement and connected health departments with environmental justice (EJ) groups, fostering a more justice-centered approach to public health. See an overview of APHA's key activities and intended impacts in their [CCHE theory of change \(slide 11, 2022\)](#), described in more detail below.

## Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

**Increased coordination and more resources to advance the climate justice movement.** APHA convenes a cross-sectoral advisory board to work together and strengthen the field; supported the launch of the Science and Community Action Network (SciCAN) to unite EJ advocates and other technical experts to share resources, lessons learned, and opportunities for future collaboration; convened multiple roundtable discussions with various EJ, philanthropic, and public health experts to share best practices and develop guidance on moving their field forward together; and cocreated communications materials and technical guidance with partners in coalitions including the Extreme Heat Resilience Alliance, International Transformational Resilience Coalition, and Smart Surfaces Coalition.

**Trained over 5,000 professionals through trainings, workshops, communities of practice, and webinars.** Trainings have included the Climate Communications Bootcamp, APHA's inaugural Climate, Health, and Equity Summit, Building Trust-Based Community Partnerships for Public Health Professionals, Climate Justice and Children's Health, and others. In 2023, APHA helped to launch the Climate for Health Ambassadors training in partnership with ecoAmerica, an online on-demand training program designed to help the public health community build the advocacy and communication skills they need to confront the health threats of climate change and achieve health equity outcomes for their communities. As of December 2024, 190 health professionals have registered for the training, 63 have completed all modules of the training, and 50 have signed the Ambassador Pledge. APHA and ecoAmerica regularly host live versions of this training geared towards APHA members, mental health professionals, and other key audiences.

**Built state and local capacity for climate action.** APHA's Center for Climate, Health and Equity has been able to work closely with many of APHA's Affiliated Public Health Associations to spur state and local climate and health work through the State Partners for

Climate and Health Equity program and the Smart Surfaces Initiative. In 2022, Maine, Nevada, California, Maryland, and Tennessee affiliates turned Kresge-funded mini-grants and APHA strategic support into concrete, self-determined projects that raised awareness of and advocated for more equitable climate policy at the state level, and equipped public health professionals to be advocates and champions for climate action. Taking lessons from this pilot program, APHA worked with the Smart Surfaces Coalition to launch the Cities for Smart Surfaces initiative in 2023, securing commitments from 10 major U.S. cities to address climate and health equity through built environment solutions to urban heat and flooding. This project has provided six Affiliates (in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Oregon, and South Carolina) with the strategic guidance, trainings, and communications materials needed to engage with frontline and faith partners to advance these solutions.

**Promoted next-generation advocacy.** APHA has provided children's books on climate, health, equity, and belonging to 375 educators across the U.S., reaching tens of thousands of young learners with empowering content. Their Climate and Health Youth Education Toolkit has been used in 462 U.S. classrooms, and 300 more through the Worldwide Climate and Justice Education Week initiative. It's also been adopted by the EPA, Hawaii's Department of Education, New Jersey Department of Education and other educational bodies. APHA has also collaborated with 25 college student groups to host climate justice events on their respective campuses through the Kresge-funded Student Champions for Climate Justice Awards program. These students have influenced educational standards, engaged in community service, and developed leadership skills, with some presenting at the APHA annual meeting, and they continue to connect through a LinkedIn community.

**Increased investments in climate justice and frontline community organizations.** Over the duration of the CCHE grant, APHA has made significant strides in resourcing investments in climate justice. For example, the Cities for Smart Surfaces project has successfully directed grants to frontline community organizations across the U.S., ensuring that resources reach those most affected by climate change. Additionally, APHA has facilitated connections and resource sharing between several APHA Affiliated Public Health Associations and frontline partners, strengthening collaborative efforts. Frontline partners have also been engaged in funder discussions through APHA-hosted roundtable conversations and Public Health Funder Network, promoting equitable giving practices. These informed formal guidance on these practices, [Building Power with Environmental Justice Communities: Recommendations for Equitable Grantmaking](#). As a key strategic partner in the National Academy of Medicine's Climate Communities Network, APHA contributes to guidance and shares resources and funding opportunities with frontline partners.

**Centered equity in research and solutions.** APHA established a new partnership with the joint Boston University School of Public Health-Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health-National Institutes of Health-funded CAFÉ Research Coordinating Center (RCC). This collaboration aims to Convene, Accelerate, Foster, and Expand (CAFÉ) the global climate change and health community of practice, accelerating the translation of research into practical solutions. Additionally, APHA serves on the steering committee and as the core branding partner for the Lancet Countdown on Climate and Health U.S. Policy Brief, an annual publication that provides the latest climate and health indicators and policy recommendations for the United State. They collaborated with ecoAmerica's Climate for Health program to release the [American Climate Perspectives](#) and [American Climate Metrics](#) survey results, which examine the knowledge and attitudes of U.S. residents, including APHA members, towards the health impacts of climate change. Lastly, APHA partners with and advises on the American Geophysical Union's Community Science Exchange and Community Science Journal, aiming to increase respect for community-led science.

### Select Resources and Media

- [Climate Change and Health Playbook: Adaptation Planning for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
- [Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Policy Brief for the United States of America](#)
- [Extreme Heat Resource Hub](#)
- [Climate and Health Infographics](#)
- [Trainings: Building Trust-Based Community Partnerships for Public Health Professionals and Climate Communications Bootcamp](#)
- [Climate and Health Youth Education Toolkit](#)
- [Building Power with Environmental Justice Communities: Recommendations for Equitable Grantmaking](#)

## Key Partners

APHA has worked with numerous partners in this initiative, including but not limited to: Academic partners such as The Lancet Team, GMU Center for Climate Change Communication, JHU Bloomberg American Health Initiative; Government partners such as CDC Climate and Health Program, HHS Office of Climate Change and Health Equity, National Association of County and City Health Officials, National League of Cities; and National partners like Physicians for Social Responsibility, Science and Community Action Network, ecoAmerica,

Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health, American Lung Association, Alliance of Nurses for Health Environments, National Academy of Medicine, Children’s Environmental Health Network, Kaiser Permanente, Planetary Health Alliance, National Association of Community Health Centers, Metropolitan AME Church, Climate Mental Health Network, Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice, American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, Transportation for America, Smart Growth America.

## Insights from CCHE Initiative

**APHA, a 150-year-old organization, has seen significant growth and change over the duration of its CCHE grant, particularly with the establishment of the Center for Climate, Health, and Equity (the Center) in 2019.** Initially, climate advocacy for the organization was opportunistic, but the Center has provided the infrastructure to facilitate more direct and intentional work in this space. Over the past five years, APHA has integrated climate considerations across various public health disciplines, emphasizing the intersection of climate change with fields like maternal and child health, occupational health, and public health nursing. The climate and health focus at APHA has expanded to become a central topic within the organization, fostering cross-sectional collaboration, exemplified by initiatives like the [Climate and Health Youth Education Toolkit](#). APHA’s annual meetings and National Public Health Week now prominently feature climate messages, reflecting the organization’s commitment to climate justice and health equity.

**APHA has noticed a “big shift” in the way Institutions talk about and address climate change, health, and equity.** In their work with federal, state, and local governments, the business sector, philanthropic organizations, and healthcare, APHA notes a tangible change in the way these institutions approach solutions to climate, health, and equity. For example:

- **Government:** The Biden administration’s Justice 40 initiative, influenced by EJ advocacy, has led to increased intentionality and partnerships at all government levels. APHA’s Cities for Smart Surfaces Initiative collaborates with city governments to promote learning and growth in these areas.
- **Businesses:** Partnerships with organizations like Kaiser Permanente and the Health Action Alliance have engaged businesses in climate and workforce health. However, challenges remain in making these issues less political and more accessible.
- **Funders:** There has been notable progress in funding practices, with more funders supporting smaller and less-resourced organizations. APHA has facilitated conversations between funders and EJ leaders, promoting creative, inclusive funding strategies.
- **Healthcare:** Healthcare systems are increasingly recognizing the importance of lowering their carbon footprint and engaging in community support work. APHA collaborates with partners like Health Care Without Harm, another CCHE-funded partner, to promote health equity and resilience.

**CCHE has been foundational for pursuing additional funding opportunities.** CCHE funding has been instrumental in establishing the Center, providing essential organizational infrastructure support. This foundational funding has enabled APHA to secure additional resources. For example, APHA has successfully renewed funding from the CDC Climate and Health Program, enhancing its impact on health professionals and departments. Additionally, the Cities for Smart Services Initiative, now in its second year, is funded by the Waverley Street Foundation and the JPB Foundation. This initiative involves collaboration with national and local partners, including state affiliates, the National League of Cities and the Metropolitan AME Church, to support climate justice and sustainability efforts. Through these substantial three-year grants, APHA has fostered significant capacity building, new partnerships, and learning on climate justice issues. Although still in progress, this initiative represents APHA’s most significant influx of project-based resources. APHA continues to fundraise and diversify its infrastructure support grants, which remain challenging to secure. The CCHE grant has been crucial in building the infrastructure and capacity needed to pursue and manage these additional funding opportunities.

## Looking Ahead

Building on the momentum supported by CCHE since 2019, APHA will continue to leverage its expertise, reputation, and extensive network of public health professionals to advance the climate justice movement. This includes supporting and resourcing critical partnerships. APHA will continue collaborating with SciCAN to expand resources and support for EJ movements nationwide. Additionally, APHA plans to explore more projects like Cities for Smart Surfaces coalition model. A key role for APHA will be connecting health departments with communities to ensure responsive, responsible, and respectful engagement. This may involve supporting local coalitions and networks or providing services through local APHA affiliates to link health departments with community-based organizations. APHA will also continue fundraising for community mental health wellness and resilience initiatives and its work with the [International Transformational Resilience Coalition](#).