

## PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY – LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

# Pioneering Climate Adaptation, Environmental Justice, and Health Equity in Los Angeles



### Mission:

*PSR-LA advocates for policies and practices that improve public health, eliminate nuclear and environmental threats, and address health disparities.*

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, Physicians for Social Responsibility - Los Angeles (PSR-LA) has been working to unite the powerful voice of communities with the credible voice of health professionals to help shape and lead an environmental health and justice movements in California that is rooted in the needs of low-income residents and communities of color. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3.

Through their CCHE-funded activities, PSR-LA - in partnership with Communities for a Better Environment, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE) and Esperanza Community Housing - established Leap LA, a diverse and intersectional coalition of environmental justice organizations and residents. Soon after, Pacoima Beautiful and Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples joined Leap LA, bringing impactful perspectives from Pacoima, the Northeast San Fernando Valley, and indigenous communities, which grounded Leap LA's strategies for climate adaptation. PSR-LA/Leap LA's successes in convening partners with expertise in environmental justice (EJ), public health, housing, building decarbonization, policy advocacy, and equity have led to policy wins through the City of Los Angeles. Leap LA has been at the forefront of local policymaking to ensure city officials use a holistic approach. Leap LA's partners engaged with city officials and department staff in a recent Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA), which is a City plan to assess climate hazards and develop response plans. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) engaged several LA Leap members in an equity advisory committee which resulted from LA Leap's advocacy for addressing the unintended impacts of energy transition on frontline communities. PSR-LA's CCHE-funded work is described at a high level in their [2022 CCHE theory of change \(slide 26\)](#), and in more detail below. PSR-LA's key partners for this work are listed at the end of this case story.

### Select Resources and Media

- [Website: Climate Emergency Mobilization Office](#)
- [Website: Los Angeles for Resilient and Healthy Homes](#)

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

**Advanced the first ever Climate Emergency Mobilization Office (CEMO) aimed at achieving EJ.** In January 2021, Leap LA's advocacy efforts resulted in Mayor Garcetti establishing the CEMO and have since established a firm commitment from the City that the CEMO will continue beyond the current Mayor's tenure. Since 2021, PSR-LA/Leap LA steering committee members worked with the CEMO,

Los Angeles City Council, and residents to address urgent EJ issues and Leap LA has played a critical role in connecting local government, healthcare practitioners, community-based organizations, and frontline communities to advance the decarbonization of Los Angeles and implement other EJ solutions.

**Institutionalized the values of the CEMO and advocated for the CEMO to maintain funding among competing City budget priorities, including other climate related initiatives.** PSR-LA/Leap LA has been working with City Council members, the CEMO, and partner coalitions to ensure decarbonization policies and implementation processes are community-driven and based on Just Transition principles that centers equity. Leap LA has pushed equity into the decarbonization space and emphasized how there is “no trickle-down effect in equity” among city officials. Through Leap LA’s advocacy, building decarbonization solutions are being designed around frontline communities. The CEMO [released a report](#) on equitable building decarbonization that highlighted Leap LA’s recommendations in order to ensure housing affordability, improve public health outcomes, and prevent displacement of residents. Furthermore, PSR-LA, along with Leap LA, advocated for the CEMO to maintain funding among competing City budget priorities. The CEMO will continue working with City Council members and local coalitions to ensure that building decarbonization policy implementation is community-driven and centers equity by using the Just Transition framework.

**Supported organizing to phase out oil drilling by establishing a 2,500-foot buffer between drilling and sensitive sites.** Leap LA partners including PSR-LA, Esperanza Community Housing, SCOPE, and Communities for a Better Environment also work together in the Stand Together Against Neighborhood Drilling (STAND) LA coalition. After over a decade of work, STAND-LA passed an ordinance in 2022 that declared oil drilling as a non-conforming land use to phase out oil drilling in Los Angeles and unincorporated areas.

**Targeted entities responsible for regulating many of the facilities that are polluting communities and gathered and shared expertise to ensure community perspectives are included in scientific studies and policy/project solutions.** For example, Esperanza Community Housing held a listening session with LADWP, 100 community impact researchers, and 12 community residents (tenants, Promotores, and other stakeholders). Leap LA coalition members were trained in an air quality program to identify sources of pollution that would inform an emissions reduction program. One of Leap LA’s partners, Communities for a Better Environment, is working with residents in the Wilmington and Harbor Area, areas disproportionately impacted by refineries, oil drilling, and other toxic industries.

**Advanced policies to ensure equitable and just decarbonization.** Leap LA and RePower LA collaborated with the Office of Councilmember Paul Koretz to advance a motion to set up an equitable, community-led process to design recommendations for the decarbonization of all existing buildings in Los Angeles. The motion was introduced in December 2021 and passed in March 2022. Leap LA also helped establish Los Angeles for Resilient & Health Homes (LARHH), a coalition that brought together partners in housing, environmental health, and labor. The coalition worked with the Office of Councilmember Nithya Raman to design decarbonization recommendations for new construction of residential homes and buildings which went into effect in January 2023.

**Leveraged the voice of health professionals to build allies and inform policy.** Through outreach, education, and training of health professionals, PSR-LA developed a core of health professionals who can speak to issues and support ongoing policy battles at the state and local levels. PSR-LA hosted a Health Ambassador Program (HAP) training in March 2022 on Improving Public Health in California through Emission Reduction Strategies. PSR-LA also hosted other HAP trainings on the intersectionality of EJ issues, training over 60 health professionals in policy advocacy. Leap LA has also trained healthcare practitioners over the years which led to increased awareness of climate, health, and equity-related issues in the medical community. For example, Esperanza Community Housing has partnered with St. John’s Well and Childhood Center, who received grant funding to develop a resilience center in South Los Angeles to provide health care and emergency respite to residents.

**Pursued an effective inside-outside strategy that allows the community to support good policy, while also pushing back on bad policy.** Leap LA’s dynamic coalition building allowed them to develop a strong inside-outside policy strategy that includes community members at the forefront. The coalition developed the following new vision statement, which established an identity aside from their work with the CEMO: *“Located on unceded Tongva, Tataviam, and Chumash lands, Leap LA aims to create spaces to practice healing, rematriation, and community resilience. We recognize that BIPOC, economically exploited, and frontline communities bear the burden of the existing settler-colonial extractive and toxic economy. Our coalition is made up of intergenerational, multiracial, and intersectional community-based organizations. We organize to uphold principles of Tribal Sovereignty and community self-determination in order to influence systemic change, governance structures and achieve climate justice.”*

**Developed participatory democracy tools to ensure a public-led process for advancing intersectional solutions.** PSR-LA and Leap LA engaged residents and partners across housing, labor, and EJ sectors to identify community concerns and advocate for appropriate

safeguards and funding for affordable housing. This included mobilizing members and residents to attend the Climate Equity LA series, focus groups, and engage in other advocacy efforts at the City. PSR-LA, south Los Angeles grassroots leaders, and Leap LA members also engaged the incoming City of Los Angeles' Mayor to uplift the energy equity priorities of south Los Angeles families and frontline communities.

Community workshops sponsored by PSR-LA and facilitated by Pueblo Planning focused on introducing community members to the idea of building decarbonization and cultivating voices for energy equity and climate justice. Through grassroots organizing and co-educating coalition members, Leap LA enabled residents to inform climate adaptation solutions related to extreme heat, poor air quality, and fossil fuel extraction in South Los Angeles communities that were disproportionately impacted by these issues. Leap LA has also grown into the extreme heat space and launched the Prioritizing Local Action for Climate Equity (PLACE) Project to educate and train residents on the impacts of extreme heat and heat safety.

**Collaborated with national EJ partners and the CEMO to find resources for community-driven projects.** Recently, the California Endowment approached Leap LA to provide a new grant for their work. Leap LA has built immense credibility with the California Endowment over the years and Leap LA decided to use this new grant to ensure that all lead organizations in Leap LA, who were not already funded through the CCHE initiative, received funding for their contributions.

## Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **Narratives around climate resilience, EJ, and equity can be co-opted by other sectors to promote false climate solutions.** There are often cases where Leap LA must push back against false narratives about green hydrogen and carbon capture and storage that are promoted as climate solutions by other sectors that justify their solutions by using language and narratives that Leap LA has developed with communities.
- **Fundraising for this intersectional and coalition-based work can be challenging.** Despite the multi-year funding from the Kresge Foundation, there is a need for additional funding sources to support Leap LA's capacity to cover emerging issues and streams of work across Los Angeles.
- **There continues to be a need to further engage with public health practitioners.** Public health partners have not been as inclusive as they need to be with understanding how the impacts of climate change are connected to social determinants of health (SDOH).
- **Integration of silos makes it possible to understand how equity can inform durable solutions for communities.** Leap LA has been impactful and more representative than other coalitions, as members have interconnecting areas of expertise, which enabled Leap LA to push for intersectional solutions.

## Looking Ahead

PSR-LA, along with Leap LA, is focused on a future beyond the CEMO and operationalizing their new vision statement. The coalition began without funding, grew with funding from the CCHE initiative, and remains galvanized given the ways in which they learned to work together. Leap LA created deep relationships, increased their strength of community, and will continue to build the coalition. PSR-LA/Leap LA is steadfast in developing climate resiliency in the frontlines of Los Angeles and is focused on securing funding for their long-term work.

## Key Partners

Organization	Type
CalEPA	Government Partner
City of Los Angeles	Government Partner

Organization	Type
Climate Emergency Mobilization Office	Government Partner
Communities for a Better Environment	Community Partner
Esperanza Community Housing	Community Partner
LA Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)	Community Partner
LA Leap	Community Partner
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power	Government Partner
LARHH Coalition	Community Partner
Mayor's Office of Energy and Sustainability	Government Partner
Pacoima Beautiful	Community Partner
Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples	Community Partner
SAJE	Community Partner
SCOPE	Institutional Partner
South Coast Air Quality Management District	Government Partner
Strategic Actions for a Just Economy	Community Partner
The California Endowment	Institutional Partner