



Climate Change and Human Health

Recent unprecedented heat waves, [forest fires](#) and torrential storms have extreme effects on both planetary AND human health. While 2023 was recorded as the [hottest year on record](#), 2024 is likely to take over soon, and not just in the US. In 2024, 63 countries had their warmest June on record and most Americans have experienced an [extreme weather event](#) over the past year.

- BIPOC and low-income communities, in addition to certain immigrant groups, pregnant women, elderly, infants and children, among others are [disproportionately](#) at risk of developing adverse health conditions due to weather events for a variety of reasons.
- Fewer trees result in urban heat islands and increase risk of flooding; there are greater areas of poor housing and/or surrounding infrastructure; there is reduced access to healthcare, social services, or safe food and water; and those with high risk, chronic medical problems, such as diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses, are at greater risk of having exacerbation of their symptoms. In addition, inability to rebuild after an

extreme event or worsening of medical conditions can have effects on mental health.

- The EPA discusses “overlapping vulnerabilities,” such as an elderly person with limited mobility issues being unable to get to a safe place during a heat wave. [WHO](#) estimates that climate change is expected to cause about ¼ million additional deaths just from under-nutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress between 2030 and 2050.

As healthcare providers, we should encourage our patients to get outdoors when the weather is safe. **However, we also need to be aware of times when our patients should remain inside.** Consider speaking with your patients and helping them prepare for extreme weather events. Talk to them about having quick access to emergency numbers and storing bottled water, extra food and medications in their home. Talk to them about what they would do in an emergency situation.

Aside from directly talking to our patients, we can also help in many other ways. Here are just a few suggestions:



- We can choose greener modes of transportation and promote policies that reduce carbon emissions and develop a clean energy economy.
- We can join other healthcare professionals who are part of organizations that fight climate change and promote health, such as the [Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health](#).
- We can [plant trees](#) and promote the development of greenspaces in cities and other areas without adequate greenspace.

Provider of the Month

"I decided to become a doctor and weave environmental health and medicine together into a career."



Lisa Patel, MD, MEd, FAAP

Clinical Associate Professor of Pediatrics,
Stanford Children's Health;

Executive Director, [Medical Society
Consortium on Climate and Health](#)

I got my start working on environmental issues when I saw the movie *Contact*. I was working at *Barnes & Noble* at the time and spent the rest of that summer behind the cash register reading every Carl Sagan book I could consume.

Understanding how precious, unique, big, and small our earth is, I studied ecology and evolution, worked on tropical forest conservation, and became an environmental scientist for the [Environmental Protection Agency](#). It was while I was working on an air pollution project in Mumbai and taken to a gymnasium next to the hospital that served as overflow for all the children with asthma that I had an epiphany: fossil fuels were both sickening the planet by driving climate change and sickening the lungs of children in front of me.

I decided to become a doctor and weave environmental health and medicine together into a career. I spent years honing my skills as an advocate with the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) across a range of issues to protect children's health. In 2019, when youth protests demanding action for climate change increased global consciousness, I found legions of health professionals and students concerned about climate change as a crisis of health and inequity. I worked with them on whatever needed doing: elevating the health risks of wildfires, helping public schools in California prepare for the climate crisis, organizing for healthcare sustainability at my hospital, and developing board certification materials for pediatricians on climate change.

Today, I lead the [Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health](#) where I have the privilege of working with a vast network of health professionals around the country doing inspired things everyday to make the world a better place.

What is the [Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health](#)?

This is a consortium that organizes major medical societies, representing over 1 million health care professionals. Their main messages are:

- Climate change is harming Americans today, with people of color and communities living in poverty experiencing greater harm.
- The way to slow or stop these harms is to decrease the use of fossil fuels and increase energy efficiency and the use of clean energy sources.
- These changes in energy choices will improve the quality of our air and water and bring immediate health benefits.

They focus on policies to make changes that will improve health and equity at the local, state and national level.



What is [Neighborhood Forest](#)?

Neighborhood Forest is one non-profit organization, among many, that plants trees in urban communities around the US. It is unique in that it gives free trees to kids to plant, helping not only the community but also fostering a love for nature. This past [Earth Day](#) alone, this organization gave over 67,000 trees to children in North America to be planted.

Grant Searching

PRA recently applied for a Community Forestry Grant to plant trees at El Centro Clinic in Houston, Texas, a clinic we recently worked with to reduce provider burnout by donating indoor nature enhancements. Unfortunately, our proposal was not accepted but we continue to look for other funding sources to move this work forward. Tamberly Conway (Founder and CEO of [Conservation Conexions](#)), Paola Silva-Rodriguez (biologist and ANFT guide), and PRA wrote a proposal to both plant and tend trees at El Centro Clinic in order to provide personal and environmental benefits of nearby trees and to increase time outdoors to improve healthcare providers' health.

We want to hear from you!

With over 1,800 registered providers across the country, we know there are a lot of stories out there of prescribing nature for the first time and patient successes. Take a moment to [Share Your Story](#) and get a chance to be showcased on our [Provider Spotlight](#) page.

[Share Your Story](#)

PRA is grateful for your donation to help us keep our website and platform accessible to all!

[Donate](#)

Park Rx America is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.
All donations are tax deductible. Our EIN is **82-0856734**.

Keeping in mind the secondary trauma of caring for others, please take the time you need to recover and consider a dose of nature for yourself.

Robert Zarr, MD, MPH

Founder & Medical Director

Stacy Beller Stryer, MD

Associate Medical Director

