

# How to engage the population with climate change? Frame it as a public health issue

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Recent research in Environmental Communication examines the powerful influence of mass media portrayal of climate change and subsequent public identification with the issue. Climate change is often reported as an environmental issue, this depiction arguably lacks personal relevance to individuals. Weathers and Kendall study US reportage of climate change in a public health frame; a more powerful presentation for motivating public engagement and action against climate change?

The majority of the US public are known to largely gain their understanding of [climate change](#) from the mass media. Previous climate change communications have largely been from a scientific and environmental perspective, leaving audiences disaffected. Little coverage has raised [public health](#) consequences of climate change such as higher incidence of asthma, allergies, disease and heat stroke amongst many. Would US citizens alter consumer decisions and seek solutions to climate change if they realised the implications for human health in their own communities as well as the Arctic? The authors conduct a multi-year content analysis of 270 US climate change news reports in a public health context to assess quantity and style of reporting delivered to Americans.

A 2007 Gallup poll of US citizens revealed 41% to be personally worried about climate change. In 2010 this dropped to 28%. Is this correlated to media coverage? Consumer demand for dramatized news has dictated less coverage on climate change over the study period, but did the style

of presentation change? Climate change articles were classified into public health related issues; general health, heat, weather, respiratory problems, water/food borne disease and vermin borne disease. Despite a drop in coverage, those framed in a public health context sharply increased, especially in relation to heat and general health, evidence of public health framing as an effective means to communicate climate change. The authors urge increased coverage of climate change in a public health context to bridge the knowledge gap between the public health community and the general public to encourage mitigating steps. Weathers and Kendall note "here is one starting point for examining, tracking, and critically assessing the story of climate change in public health terms—a project that deserves further attention from communication, environment, and public health scholars."

**More information:** "Developments in the Framing of Climate Change as a Public Health Issue in US Newspapers." *Environmental Communication*, [DOI: 10.1080/17524032.2015.1050436](https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2015.1050436)

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