

People may support climate action more strongly if they understand how their health is at risk

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Highlighting the health relevance of climate change and the health benefits of climate solutions can generate support for climate action, a

[major review](#) of evidence on the subject has found.

The comprehensive new review of research from around the world concludes that:

- There is still limited understanding of the health effects of climate change in the U.S., U.K. and Canada. Awareness is higher in countries that are more vulnerable to climate change's health impacts.
- Framing climate change as a public health issue can be an effective way to enhance public engagement with the issue and generate support for pro-climate policies and action.
- Health-framed messaging can be particularly valuable as it increases support for [climate action](#) among people across the [political spectrum](#), including among those who tend to be less concerned about climate change.
- Highlighting the health harms of climate change and the health benefits of climate action are both effective, although information about the health benefits of climate solutions is the more effective of the two.
- In many countries, health professionals are often considered trusted voices who can help to amplify and deliver the human health consequences of climate change.

The authors cautioned that:

- Scarcity of data, particularly in non-Western contexts, remains a challenge for development of conclusive engagement strategies.
- While the evidence for the effectiveness of framing climate change as a health issue is largely positive, a few studies show null or counterproductive effects under certain conditions, including when audiences have difficulty identifying with the people being impacted by climate change.

- Messaging that emphasizes heightened vulnerability of some people may increase engagement among some audiences but may also have the effect of undermining concern and support for action among audiences that are less vulnerable and may exacerbate polarization.

The research was conducted by a team from the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication and was commissioned by Wellcome, the global health foundation that supports science to solve urgent health challenges.

The report comes during COP28, the first COP at which the human health effects of climate change are being acknowledged through an international declaration and a thematic day dedicated to discussion of the impact of climate change on health.

The review looked at research published in the past twenty-three years, on the views of the public, health professionals, and [public officials](#) regarding the health impacts of climate change, and evaluations of different strategies for communicating these impacts and future risks. It took into account nearly 200 studies published in English, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish.

The authors note that while there is a valuable existing body of evidence, a number of research questions remain outstanding. They propose a set of priorities for future research on public, health professionals, and policy-maker attitudes toward climate and health topic including further context-specific research to address gaps in audience-driven climate and health communications. Wellcome awarded funding to the GMU Center to explore further how policymakers perceive health impacts of climate change.

The research will be discussed at the "Inspiring urgent climate action:

generating and communicating evidence on climate and health' event on 2 December 2023 at the COP28 Health Pavilion.

Neha Dewan, senior insight advisor at Wellcome, said, "We're witnessing the drastic impacts of climate change on health more starkly each day, especially among communities most at risk. Insights into how people receive messages about climate and health are important as we seek to raise awareness of the risks, and work for action to combat climate change.

"Health-informed climate messaging can be a powerful driver of [public engagement](#) with healthy climate action. Communication at the intersection of climate change and health also has the potential to build support for ambitious climate targets and policies that protect and benefit both human and planetary health."

Professor Edward Maibach, director of the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University, said, "This is the most comprehensive review of research ever conducted on public understanding and health professional's understanding of the human health relevance of climate change. We think the findings are important because they strongly suggest that health professionals can—and many are willing to—play an important role in building public support for ambitious [climate](#) action.

"More research of this type should be done to confirm these findings, especially in the Global South, but we hope this review sends a clear 'green light' to the many [health professionals](#) who are already working to educate the public and policymakers about the [health](#) relevance of [climate change](#)."

More information: Sri Saahitya Saahitya Uppalapati et al, A Global Review of Research on Effective Advocacy and Communication

Strategies at the Intersection of Climate Change and Health (2023). [DOI: 10.31219/osf.io/6w3qh](https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/6w3qh)

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