

# Making the case for addressing climate change



A review of select  
message guides for  
communicating  
about climate  
change and  
public health



## Acknowledgments

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# Message guide review

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# Introduction

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In a world where the impacts of climate change on racial and health equity touch many — if not all — aspects of our lives, we need effective strategies to communicate about them. That’s why many health and research organizations that study climate change and/or strategic communication offer recommendations for effective messaging on how climate intersects directly with health equity and public health.

To help public health professionals identify messages that can effectively communicate the health-related challenges associated with climate change, Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG) sought out existing message guides that 1) prioritize addressing the public health and racial equity considerations of climate change action and 2) provide high-quality, actionable resources for engaging communities, policymakers, and partners.

These message guides each offer clear, research-backed strategies to help advocates, health practitioners, and policymakers craft compelling narratives that inspire action. Whether you need quick, ready-to-use messages or in-depth frameworks, these resources will equip you with the tools to make the case across diverse audiences.



# Message development 101

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When it comes to [developing messages](#) to talk about the health impacts of climate change or any other important topic, we recommend the following simple formula:

- 1) Name the problem.
- 2) Talk about why it matters.
- 3) Tell people what should be done and who should do it.

Although these components do not have to be in this order, every successful message should contain them. Once you have addressed the problem, why it matters, and the solution, you will have the core of your message, which then can be expanded or distilled, depending on the format you plan to use to deliver it.



## **Here's a guide on what to include in each component:**

### **1. Name the problem.**

Clearly state your concern, i.e., what the problem is and how it affects people.

- What are the issues your community is facing that are leading to poor health outcomes?
- What data can you share that show how people are being affected?

Even though you might be tempted to share a lot of the available data on climate health, resist that urge. Instead, focus on the aspect of the problem that your proposed solution will address.

***Remember, it is impossible to be comprehensive and strategic at the same time.***



## **2. Say why it matters.**

Use shared values, such as ingenuity, interconnectedness, or pride of place, to describe why you care. BMSG's research shows that the values component is often absent; solutions are named but not justified at a values level.

Public health professionals may state a fact or show data — e.g. “X number of people are experiencing homelessness,” or “X number of people are hungry” — but this is an expression of the problem, not why it matters and what it means to our society at large. Value statements should indicate why you and your target should care about this issue.

***Naming your values can help mobilize others who hold similar values, as a way to reach your target.***



## **3. Emphasize the solution.**

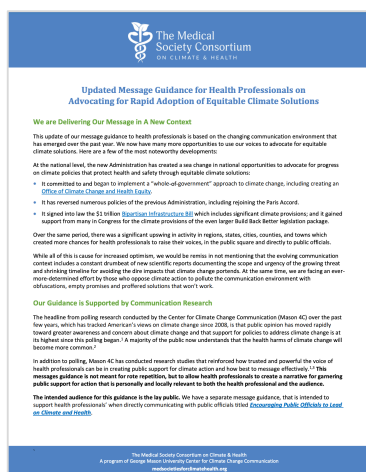
A common messaging pitfall is that messengers often expend so much energy communicating about the problem that when the inevitable question about the solution is asked, they are ill-prepared to answer it. It's more effective to answer with a specific, feasible solution, which will usually be an incremental step toward the larger goal or vision. Spending time speaking about your solution and how it will work can invigorate your audience and remind them that all problems are not intractable and that something can be done to solve or address it.

# Guides for those short on time

These message guides provide quick tips and examples that practitioners can easily integrate into social media posts, talking points, and other climate change work.

## Updated Message Guidance for Health Professionals on Advocating for Rapid Adoption of Equitable Climate Solutions

—Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health



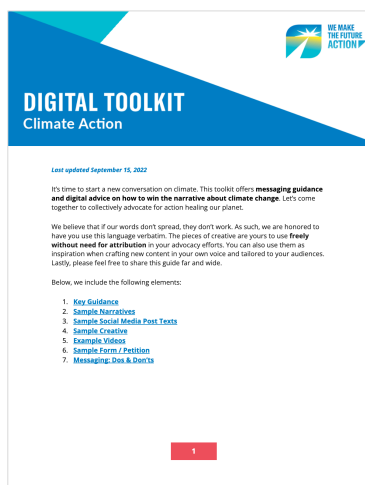
This guide offers **eight key recommendations, each accompanied by sample messages**. It also presents polling data that shows growing public awareness and concern about climate change, noting that support for climate policies is at its highest recorded levels. The guide's values-based, solution-oriented approach aligns with BMSG's [message strategy recommendations](#). Most importantly, this resource outlines steps — similar to BMSG's [Layers of Strategy](#) — that help us identify the problem, solution, and those who have the power to enact change. Among the key messages are that climate impacts are happening now — not in the future — and that climate solutions bring immediate improvement to health in the local community. The same group is also the author of “[Encouraging Public Officials to Lead on Climate and Health](#),” another valuable climate health messaging resource.

### Key lessons

- Establish who you are and your values.
- Establish the climate-health connection: Climate change is already harming our health, and, without rapid and concerted action, many more lives will be lost or harmed — especially those who are most harmed by our current systems.
- Establish who is harmed first and worst: We are all vulnerable to the harms of climate change, but some of us are more vulnerable than others.

## Digital Toolkit: Climate Action

—We Make the Future Action



Although not explicitly focused on public health messaging, **this simple and digestible guide provides sample messages** that include values, solutions, history, and dos and don'ts — messages that could be adapted for the public health context. It gives examples for communicating how large corporations and some elected officials perpetuate the drivers of climate change. The guide also includes videos, graphics, and captions ready to be shared on social media. The guide uses a helpful mnemonic, "Values, Villain, Vision," to frame the key components of effective climate messages. It also includes helpful tips on how to proactively talk about race.

### Sample message

America has always been a yes-we-can kind of place. We led the way into space and onto cell phones and the internet. Today, the next big thing is clean energy: affordable, local wind and solar power made right here and now, across [the United States] in California and Texas, Iowa and North Carolina. Clean energy to power our lives at home and work, create high-wage work in [the U.S.], and free us from the outdated fuels that pollute our air and water and change our climate. [The U.S.] can lead us again in the new energy future, with innovations that will fuel a cleaner, safer, and better world for our families.

Values

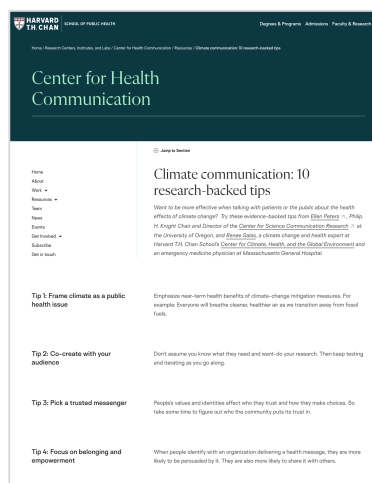
Problem

Solution

-Adapted from "Digital Toolkit: Climate Action"

## Climate Communication: 10 research-backed tips

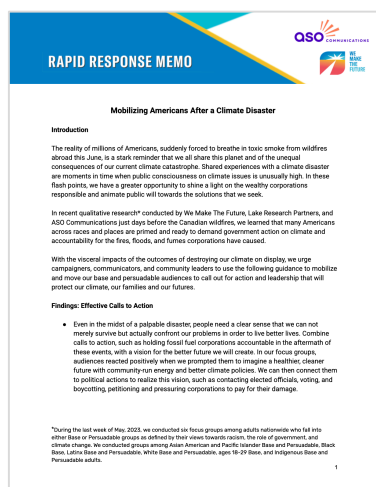
—Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health



This quick 1-pager highlights 10 research-backed tips for framing climate change as a public health issue and channeling feelings into actions. It notes the importance of credible messengers whose values and identities reflect those of the audience.

## Rapid Response Memo: Mobilizing Americans After a Climate Disaster

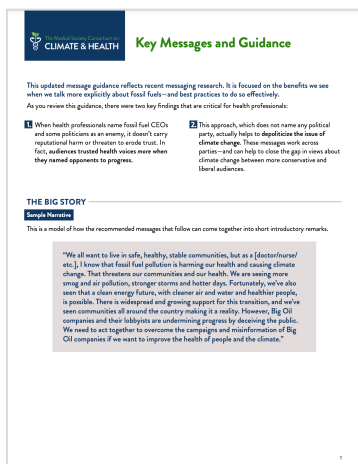
—We Make the Future's Climate Cohort, ASO Communications, HIT Strategies, and Lake Research Partners



This guide aligns with BMSG's recommended components of effective messages, such as including values, naming the problem, and presenting a solution. **This is a straightforward memo that helps readers get a quick understanding of the top-level items they should include in an effective message to leverage how the public is primed for messages that name the villain and inspire a positive vision for the future after a climate disaster, such as a flood or fire.** It recommends combating cynicism by naming past victories achieved.

## Key Messages and Guidance

—The Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health



This guide asks messengers to name the role of fossil fuel CEOs and politicians in perpetuating climate change. It also provides **tested messages about the root causes of climate change.**

### Sample message

We all want to live in safe, healthy, stable communities, but as a [doctor / nurse / etc.], I know that fossil fuel pollution is harming our health and causing climate change. That threatens our communities and our health. We are seeing more smog and air pollution, stronger storms, and hotter days. Fortunately, we've also seen that a clean energy future, with cleaner air and water and healthier people, is possible. There is widespread and growing support for this transition, and we've seen communities all around the country making it a reality.

Values

Problem

Solution

—From “Key Messages and Guidance”

## Guides that connect climate change to health

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These guides provide messaging strategies for public health practitioners, health care providers, and others who want to communicate the health impacts of climate change.

### Real, Urgent & Now: Communicating the Health Impacts of Climate Change

—Climate and Health Alliance



This brief messaging guide is packed with usable information and examples. It equips health practitioners and their partners with effective communication strategies to frame climate change as a public health issue. **The guide provides general recommendations, dos and don'ts, example messages, and key messaging principles to motivate action.** It also highlights the severe health impacts of climate change — from respiratory diseases to mental health stressors — and offers practical ways for health practitioners to advocate for change.

*If you are pressed for time and need examples, this guide is a great place to start.*

## Communicating on Climate Change and Health: Toolkit for Health Professionals

—World Health Organization



This toolkit is designed for health practitioners, including doctors, nurses, public health officials, advocates, researchers, and students. It includes key facts, storytelling techniques, sample messages, and case studies. **The guide emphasizes the urgent health impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, air pollution, vector-borne diseases, and mental health stressors.** It also highlights the co-benefits of climate action, such as cleaner air, improved physical activity, and community resilience.

### Sample message

Climate change is one of the biggest health threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As health practitioners, our role is to protect people from the health effects of climate change. Climate change will especially impact the health of many of our patients, like children, elderly people, people experiencing disadvantage, or people with disabilities or chronic illness. Making our workplace sustainable by prioritizing renewable energy, active transport, and protecting green spaces will help us become more resilient during extreme weather events. All in all, sustainable healthcare is good for the planet and good for our budget.

Values

Problem

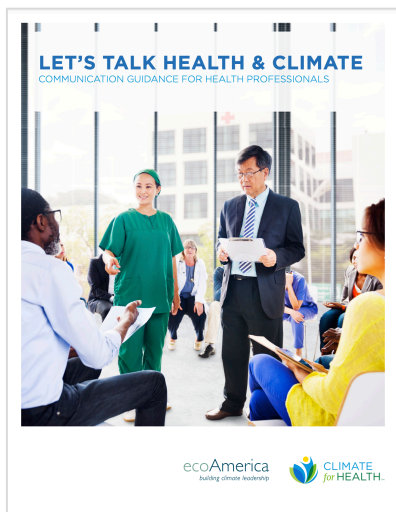
Solution

-From "Communicating on Climate Change and Health: Toolkit for Health Professionals"



## Let's Talk Health and Climate: Communication Guidance for Health Professionals

—Climate for Health, a program of ecoAmerica



This guide starts by highlighting vulnerabilities to climate change, such as limited resources, pre-existing health conditions, and systemic inequities, and their impact on children, older adults, and communities of color. **It synthesizes social science research and message testing to help health practitioners communicate about climate change as a public health issue.** The guide provides key messages, language recommendations, talking points, and sample speeches to effectively frame climate solutions as health priorities. Additionally, this guide focuses on audience engagement strategies, emphasizing values-based communication and community involvement.

### Sample message

We would love to leave our children and future generations a healthy place for them to raise children of their own. Our communities are experiencing notable climate impacts, including rising temperatures, irregular rainfall patterns, higher produce prices, and intense storms and heat waves, all of which impact health. We can move away from the dirty fuels that make us sick and shift toward safe, clean energy like wind and solar.

Values

Problem

Solution

—From “Let’s Talk Health and Climate: Communication Guidance for Health Professionals”

## Changing the Story About Park and Green Space Equity: A Messaging Guide for Advocates

—Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG)



BMSG's message guide on park and green space equity **provides essential messaging strategies for public health advocates, emphasizing how park and green space equity intersects with climate change, racial justice, and health inequities.** Climate change exacerbates inequities in access to parks, worsening extreme heat, air pollution, and environmental stress.

This guide helps communicators frame increasing green spaces as a climate resilience tool and provides examples of using values-based messaging, metaphors, and community-centered narratives. It also offers practical tactics for engaging policymakers and

media to advocate for climate-smart, equitable green spaces that promote health and social justice.

***“This new narrative will need to encompass the joy of the world we want to see, not just the harms we need to rectify in the short term.”***

-From “Changing the Story About Park and Green Space Equity: A Messaging Guide for Advocates”

# Guides that center racial equity in climate communication

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These guides focus on effective climate messaging that explicitly addresses racial equity and highlights systemic injustices, uplifts community-driven solutions, and ensures that climate narratives are inclusive, empowering, and action-oriented.

## Full Narrative Strategies for Climate Migration + resource guide, worksheets, webinar recording, and blog

—Narrative Initiative



These resources outline a **strategic communication framework at the intersection of climate justice and migrant justice**.

Designed for organizers, advocates, and cultural strategists, it offers narrative guidance on how to shift public understanding around climate-linked displacement by centering human dignity, collective care, and practical solutions. The deck highlights harmful



narratives to avoid (e.g., fear, chaos, scarcity) and introduces messaging strategies that foreground community resilience, interdependence, and values-based storytelling. It also includes dos and don'ts, along with multiple real-world examples.

***“Audiences long for a better way forward and a future where everyone can thrive.”***

—From “Full Narrative Strategies for Climate Migration”

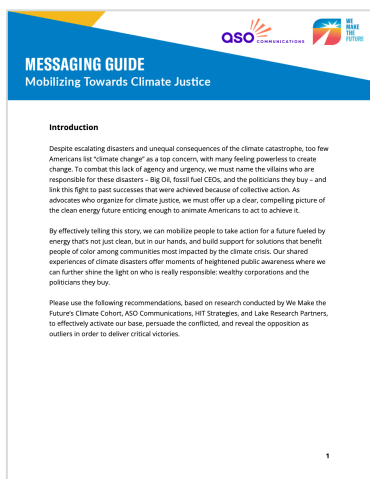
## Sample key lessons

—excerpted from the Narrative Initiative

<b>Dos</b> 	<b>Don'ts</b> 
<b>Frame migration as part of the solution</b> and a form of adaptation to climate change.	Don't use crisis language when talking about climate-linked mobility.
<b>Refer to people first.</b>	Don't label people, e.g., don't refer to "asylum seekers," "refugees," or "migrants" without context.
<b>Assert human rights.</b>	Never repeat harmful frames, even in negating them. Don't say: It is "not illegal to seek asylum," "not a threat," or that there "is no need for fear," etc.

## Messaging Guide: Mobilizing Towards Climate Justice



—We Make the Future's Climate Cohort, ASO Communications, HIT Strategies, and Lake Research Partners



This concise and practical **messaging guide offers research-backed strategies for mobilizing support for climate justice**. It includes key messaging recommendations, dos and don'ts, and sample messages to help advocates effectively communicate about climate solutions. It places a strong emphasis on racial equity, incorporating the [race/class narrative](#) to highlight systemic injustices and community-driven solutions. The guide also provides supplemental resources, including webinars, rapid response guides, and focus group findings, making it a valuable resource for those needing ready-to-use examples and messaging frameworks.

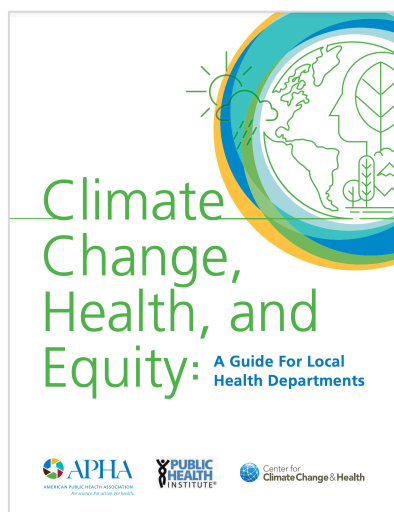
### Sample key lessons

—excerpted from *Mobilizing Towards Climate Justice*

Embrace 	Replace 	Why
Publicly owned utility providers Nonprofit utility	Comparisons to other public services, like schools or libraries	Comparisons to existing public goods don't prove convincing, likely because they aren't consumer goods.
Corporate utility providers Fossil fuel CEOs	Local utility companies Private utility providers	Remind listeners these are wealthy corporations, not neighborhood entities.

## Climate Change, Health, and Equity: A Guide for Local Health Departments

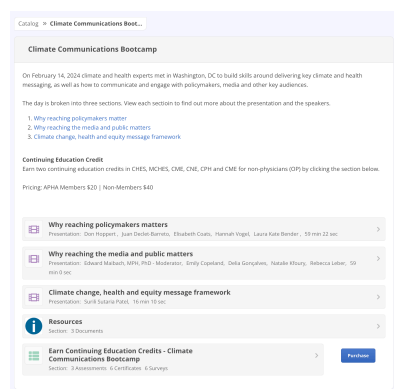
—American Public Health Association



This guide centers health equity and climate change, with a focus on how climate change disproportionately impacts the health of low-income communities and communities of color. It **emphasizes how local health departments can be at the front lines of communicating about climate change in real-time with communities**. This resource also provides snapshots of how to conceptualize air quality, extreme weather, and pollution in our day-to-day lives and includes helpful, ready-to-use examples.

## Climate Communications Bootcamp

—American Public Health Association



This is a three-part video series on how to deliver key climate and health messages and engage with policymakers, the media, and other key audiences. For those interested in comprehensive training on climate change messaging, these hour-long videos illuminate the political landscape and how to frame climate change as an equity and public health issue. The video series includes messages from the Kresge Foundation's [“Climate Change, Health, & Equity: Message Framework”](#) (see next page).

## Climate Change, Health, & Equity: Message Framework

—The Kresge Foundation



This guide is **designed for engaging policymakers, decision-makers, public health practitioners, and health system leaders who influence climate and health policy**, and includes worksheets to help readers identify their core message, problem statements, values, and solutions. It also serves funders and community-based organizations seeking to integrate racial and social justice into climate change advocacy. It frames climate instability as a threat to public health, economic stability, and national security, urging collective action to redesign policies and practices that drive inequities.

### Sample message

Our opportunity and ability to thrive — as individuals, families, communities, and as a country — is in danger because of the increasing instability of the climate. **Pollution is dirtying the air, harming our health, and scientists agree that burning fossil fuels is causing harmful climate change.** **To protect everyone's health, we need to safeguard the air we breathe and the water we drink, as well as the places we spend time — like schools, hospitals, churches and places of worship, parks, community centers, supermarkets, and stores — and the forests, grasslands, and natural areas on which we all depend.**

Values

Problem

Solution

-Adapted from "Climate Change, Health, & Equity: Message Framework"

## Further reading: Data and tools

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To shape climate and health messaging, it's essential to ground our work in both local context and public sentiment. The tools in this section help identify which communities face the greatest climate-related health risks and why. Paired with polling and research data from leading national institutions, these resources offer insight into how people perceive climate change, who they trust, and what motivates action.

### *Local data on health equity and climate change*

#### **Climate Change & Health Vulnerability Indicators for California (CCHVIs)**

—California Department of Public Health

The Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Indicators can be helpful in identifying the people and places that are more susceptible to adverse health impacts associated with climate change. Through the CCHViz interactive data visualization platform, users can explore 21 indicators, spanning environmental exposures, population sensitivity, and adaptive capacity, at the county level.

#### **California Healthy Places Index (HPI)**

—Public Health Alliance of Southern California

The California Healthy Places Index (HPI) is an interactive online data and GIS mapping tool that allows users to easily visualize the social and economic conditions that shape health in each neighborhood in California.





## Polling data

### **Climate Change in the American Mind: Beliefs & Attitudes, Fall 2023**

—Yale Program on Climate Change Communication

This national survey by Yale and George Mason University captures how Americans currently think and feel about climate change. Key findings show that 73% believe global warming is happening, with nearly half reporting personal experiences of its effects.

### **American Climate Perspectives Survey 2024, Vol. I**

—Climate for Health, a program of ecoAmerica

This report of ecoAmerica's American Climate Perspectives Survey explores public attitudes toward climate change, government responsibility, and the motivations that drive support for climate solutions.

### **A Global Review of Research on Effective Advocacy and Communication Strategies at the Intersection of Climate Change and Health**

—George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication

This comprehensive global literature review synthesizes decades of research on how public audiences, health professionals, and policymakers understand and respond to the health impacts of climate change.



Anything missing? If you have a climate change and health messaging guide you would like to use that we missed, please let us know at [guardado@bmsg.org](mailto:guardado@bmsg.org).