



April 10, 2024

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
 Chair
 House Appropriations Subcommittee
 on Labor, Health and Human Services,
 Education, and Related Agencies
 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
 Ranking Member
 House Appropriations Subcommittee
 on Labor, Health and Human Services,
 Education, and Related Agencies
 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
 Chair
 Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
 on Labor, Health and Human Services,
 Education, and Related Agencies
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
 Ranking Member
 Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
 on Labor, Health and Human Services,
 Education, and Related Agencies
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Aderholt and Baldwin and Ranking Members DeLauro and Capito:

The undersigned health organizations urge you to fund the Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE) at \$5 million in the FY 2025 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. This funding is needed to protect the health of all people in the face of environmental hazards, especially for those experiencing a disproportionately high share of exposures and impacts, as well as to address the climate impacts on the health care sector.

Climate change is a health emergency. It is both an unprecedented challenge to our health, equity, and prosperity, and an unprecedented opportunity to create healthier, more secure, and more sustainable lives for all.

The urgent public health threat is increasingly clear. In recent years, the nation has endured increasingly frequent and intense hurricanes, heat waves and wildfires, droughts, and flooding. Infectious diseases are expanding their ranges with increased distribution of and prolonged exposure to the insects that spread vector-borne diseases. These impacts are also creating increased psychological stress and negative mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, especially for young people.

Frontline communities, economically disadvantaged communities, people of color, and other marginalized communities are likely to experience disproportionately severe impacts and have less capacity to adapt to climate changes, worsening existing health disparities. For example, while

pregnant people and their pregnancies are already at especially high risk of negative health outcomes if climate impacts disrupt their care or overall well-being, pregnant people from under-served and under-represented populations face even greater risk.

Climate impacts have both short- and long-term effects on health care facilities and operations and public health infrastructure. Extreme weather events and disasters like wildfires or flooding can lead to suspended services, postponed procedures, facility closure and an inability to treat patients. As such, prompt action must be taken to build public health preparedness and resilience to climate change-related health threats, along with health care preparedness and resilience to extreme weather events and other climate-related impacts.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has a crucial role to play in confronting the climate crisis. Its Office of Climate Change and Health Equity was established to lead agency-wide efforts to ensure health care systems are addressing climate risks to their facilities, operations and communities while simultaneously mitigating their contributions to the challenge in ways that don't disrupt services. OCCHE works with HHS offices and operating divisions, many of which continue to lack dedicated climate staff or expertise, to ensure climate change impacts on health and health care are incorporated into their missions and programs. In addition, OCCHE's leadership is vital for coordination, policy development and program review, as well as the ongoing evaluation of HHS's Climate Action Plan.

As the health effects of climate change continue to grow, the importance of OCCHE's role cannot be overstated. Without an appropriate plan to address the impacts on the public health and health care system, the U.S. will continue to be underprepared. Sufficient investment will allow OCCHE to fulfill its obligation to prepare HHS to respond to the climate health crisis. We ask for your leadership in ensuring that HHS's Office of Climate Change and Health Equity receives \$5 million in Fiscal Year 2025, to help address the effects of climate change on the American people and support our health care system to become more resilient.

Thank you for considering our recommendation, and we look forward to working with you throughout this year's appropriations process.

Sincerely,

Allergy & Asthma Network
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Physicians
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
American Public Health Association
American Thoracic Society
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Children's Environmental Health Network
Climate Psychiatry Alliance

ecoAmerica/Climate for Health
Health Care Without Harm
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Environmental Health Association
National League for Nursing
National Medical Association
Oncology Advocates United for Climate and Health - International
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Trust for America's Health