Data Centers and Health

Recommendations for the Public Health Field



Introduction

Why Data Centers Are a Public Health Issue

Data centers are expanding in the U.S. and globally at an accelerated rate and are a threat to the health and well-being of communities. Researchers and advocates have raised potential health concerns related to noise and light pollution, increased air pollution, ecosystem changes, water contamination, increased climate and health impacts due to fossil fuel use and more (Tao & Gao, 2025; Gour, et al., 2026). Many of the data center placements are happening in communities already experiencing environmental injustices and poor health impacts, like communities of color and low-income communities, causing growing concern about the cumulative impacts on these communities. Populations that may be more vulnerable to fossil fuel pollution, like children, pregnant people, older adults and people who work outside, are not considered in data center placement and operations decisions, despite their elevated susceptibility to toxins like PM2.5 and nitrogen oxides (Pavlinich, E.J., 2026; Hampton & Nost, 2025). Moreover, community concerns around data centers are oftentimes unaddressed or disregarded by elected officials, governmental agencies and corporations.

Though the research is still growing, there is ample opportunity to elevate awareness and action around the public health impacts of data centers. Equity is core to the work public health professionals do, and the increasing proliferation of data center placement and operations, oftentimes in communities already experiencing health inequities, is an emerging issue that necessitates rapid response from the public health field. One model suggests that by 2030, data centers in the U.S. may contribute to 600,000 asthma cases and up to 1,300 deaths per year (Han et al., 2026). Public health professionals have the opportunity to join partners and communities in collective strategy, power-building, advocacy and action to ensure community voices and concerns influence data center decisions.

About the Roundtable

In May 2026, the American Public Health Association, APHA Environment Section, Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments and Megan Weil Latshaw of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, hosted a "Data Centers and Public Health Hybrid Roundtable" that brought together environmental justice advocates and professionals in public health, law and environmental fields. The Roundtable was hosted in response to concerns raised by partners working for environmental justice and framed through the precautionary principle of "first do no harm." One of the goals was to draft recommendations for the public health field to better respond and prepare for data center placements and operations within their communities. This cross-sectoral group of partners identified

key strategies public health professionals can employ, alongside community advocates and partners, to ensure that the public's health and community's voice are core to data center decisions, operations, enforcement and accountability. Below is a summary of proposed recommendations from the Data Centers and Public Health Hybrid Roundtable.

Recommendations for the Public Health Field

These recommendations reflect the perspectives, experiences, and professional views shared by Roundtable participants and are grounded in public-health values and community concerns. They are not based on a systematic review of the scientific literature, nor do they represent the formal policy position of every participating organization.

Learn about data centers

Many organizations, community advocates and leaders have created tools, frameworks and resources related to data center awareness, advocacy and areas of opportunity for centering community voices in this work.

Get up to speed with these resources:

- NAACP's 2026 Recommendations for Protecting Frontline Communities to Stop Dirty Data
- The Data Center Resistance Spectrum- A Young, Gifted & Green Framework
- The Exchange: Data Centers 101
- Data Centers and Health: Understanding the Impacts and Taking Action webinar series

Additional resources can be found at the end of this document.

Build a big(ger) tent

- Learn about community priorities and concerns related to data center siting, placements and operations by participating in community-led meetings, convenings and panels. Lean on existing trust-based relationships with community partners and determine how best to support community goals through a public health context.
- Join community advocates, environmental justice organizations, civil rights law organizations and non-traditional allies to strengthen democracy, increase civic participation and ensure transparency. Research has demonstrated that meaningful community involvement in environmental governance can improve environmental health outcomes (Schulz, et al., 2025), and currently, communities are given little to no opportunity to shape data center decisions, due to systemic barriers, such as underinvestment and existing burdens of environmental injustices.

Grow research and practice efforts

- Build and strengthen partnerships between community groups, researchers, clinicians, public health workers and law professionals to inform research scope. Collaborative efforts will allow findings to be shared throughout organizations and improve policy advocacy.
- Assess the expected future impact of data centers on the public's health using existing public health tools like health impacts assessments, community health assessments, economic health assessments, cumulative health assessments, environmental justice

screening tools or environmental health assessments. Share the findings to raise awareness among diverse partners, including decisionmakers and communities, and integrate health considerations in their decision-making and agreements, like community benefit policies and agreements.

- Work within trusted community hubs to share about citizen science opportunities and support communities in their involvement, for example, monitoring and documenting data center operations.
- Create simple electronic health records templates or smart phrases that make documentation of environmental concerns quick and standardized by using ICD-10-CM codes:
  - Z77.110 contact with and (suspected) exposure to air pollution;
  - Z77.111 contact with and (suspected) exposure to water pollution;
  - Z77.112 contact with and (suspected) exposure to soil pollution; and
  - Z77.118 contact with and (suspected) exposure to other environmental pollution.

Advocate to prevent health harms

- Use your voice to share the potential public health impacts of data centers with your communities. Attend a city or county council meeting or meet with your elected officials to express your concerns about data centers and work in coalition with other advocates to share your collective vision of a healthier future.
- Actively include youth in advocacy to display long-term generational interest and provide the opportunity to share the vision of a healthier future.
- Support data center moratoria on the local, state and national levels to provide additional time to assess impacts on the health, environment and surrounding community, increase awareness and transparency, and determine monitoring, oversight and remediation of data center operations.
- Support cumulative-impact siting policies that ban or restrict new data centers near housing, childcare, schools, workplaces and parks, and in communities already disproportionately burdened by pollution and environmental health inequities. These policies should protect people who are especially vulnerable to data center–related health harms, including children, pregnant people and older adults.
- Work with energy and water advocates, stewards and protectors, to strengthen federal public health protections like the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act. Some advocates are concerned about the potential loopholes around emergency use of diesel generators and the lack of national emissions standards specific to data centers (Good, et al., 2026).
- Improve federal and state accountability through engagement with state legislators, Congress, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and other agencies responsible for air, water, energy and land use decisions.
- Support community members and advocates by providing technical assistance related to communications, legislative outreach and commenting on policy. Ask community members and advocates about the types of support, expertise and resources needed to amplify their voice in these decisions.
- Provide communities with a clear map of whom to engage (e.g., zoning boards, state legislators) and shed light on the companies and funding sources behind these projects to increase transparency.

- Determine the public health impact of state preemption related to data center policy and work with partners to outline strategies to address proposed or existing state preemption if harmful to the public's health.
- Inform the public on elections and propositions through candidate questionnaires and voter guides. Ask candidates running for elected office about their stances on data center transparency, health impact assessments, community benefit ordinances and public participation in data center development.

Communicate to center communities and health

- Use public health, economic and environmental justice framing when talking about data centers. Demonstrate how data centers are often placed and operated in the same communities already disproportionately impacted by environmental injustices — Indigenous people and other communities of color, rural residents, low-income people and immigrants and refugees — due to systemic racism, policies and practices. Be vocal about the cumulative health impacts and the need for public health to be integrated into data center decisions.
- Partner with trusted messengers and leaders from within the impacted communities to share their expertise and experience related to data center operations.
- Build narrative power to share messages and stories related to data center placement and operations to amplify community voice and increase awareness of the health impacts. Storytelling evokes empathy, connection, memorable resonance and demonstrates people's lived experiences.
- Employ traditional and non-traditional public health communications channels to reach a diverse audience. Talk to reporters, join radio programs and author op-eds about data centers and health. Partner with artists, media, influencers and others to translate complex health patterns into relatable content that cuts through the online noise. Effectively partner with influencers, content creators and youth to engage the public in polarized online spaces.
- Create specific materials for countering industry misinformation regarding the necessity, urgency and safety of data centers.
- Develop a professional development and webinar series for public health departments and policymakers to bridge the knowledge gap regarding data center infrastructure and its impacts on environmental health, and their role in actively partnering with communities to address health concerns.

Appendix

The following is a list of organizations that endorse this summary of recommendations.

Roundtable participants

Name	Title	Organization
Milagros R. Elia, MA, APRN, ANP-BC	Program Manager of Climate and Clean Energy Advocacy	Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
David Morley	Research Program and QA Manager	American Planning Association
Shweta Arya	Senior Smart Surfaces Consultant, Center for Climate, Health and Equity	American Public Health Association
Gill Capper	Program Manager, Center for Climate, Health and Equity	American Public Health Association
Olubukolami David	Project Consultant, Center for Public Health Policy	American Public Health Association
Myha Hill	Intern, Center for Climate, Health and Equity	American Public Health Association
Rya Griffis	Program Manager, Center for Public Health Policy	American Public Health Association
Kate Robb	Deputy Director, Center for Public Health Policy	American Public Health Association
Ki'Ana Speights	Program Associate, Center for Climate, Health and Equity	American Public Health Association
Tia Taylor Williams	Director, Center for Public Health Policy	American Public Health Association
Dr. Natasha DeJarnett	Chair-elect, Environment Section	American Public Health Association
Surili Sutaria Patel (Facilitator of the roundtable)	Principal	Boundless Workshop
Nsedu Obot Witherspoon	Executive Director	Children's Environmental Health Network
Kristie Trousdale	Deputy Director	Children's Environmental Health Network
Adiaha Witherspoon	Intern	Children's Environmental Health Network
Garrett Smith	Intern	Children's Environmental Health Network
Roya Alkafaji	Manager, Healthy Communities	Environmental Defense Fund
Zealan Hoover		Environmental Protection Network & Lawyers for Good Government
Chitra Kumar	Civil Service and Science Advisor	Environmental Protection Network
Kelvin Fong	Assistant Professor, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health	George Washington University
Kalila Booker-Cassano	Director of Programs	Health and Environmental Funders Network

Ninya Loeppky	Program Manager	Health and Environmental Funders Network
Lindsay J Thompson	Professor of Practice	Johns Hopkins University
Megan Weil Latshaw	Associate Teaching Professor	Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Jessica Kronstadt	Program Director, Planetary Health Alliance	Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health
Cecilia Marrinan	Tech Policy Associate	Kapor Foundation
Rebecca Rehr	Director of Climate Policy and Justice	Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Kelsey Wirth	Board Chair and Co-Founder	Mothers Out Front
Abre' Conner	Director, Center for Environmental and Climate Justice	NAACP
Angie McCarthy	Maryland Conservation Advocate	Nature Forward
Angie Kaufman	Law Clerk	New Mexico Environmental Law Center
Maslyn Locke	Senior Staff Attorney	New Mexico Environmental Law Center
Khalil Shahyd	Senior Strategist, Environmental and Equity Strategies	NRDC
Adrienne L. Hollis, PhD, JD	Vice President, Environmental Justice, Health, and Community Resilience and Revitalization	National Wildlife Federation
Tracey Lewis	Senior Legislative & Policy Counsel	Public Citizen
Julie Bolthouse	Director of Land Use	Piedmont Environmental Council
Paige Knappenberger	Director of Environment & Health	Physicians for Social Responsibility
Josephine Gingerich	Health Advocacy Outreach Coordinator	Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania
Beto Martinez	Director	SciCAN
Elizabeth Friedman MD, MPH	Director	SciCAN
Stephanie Ebbs	Communications Manager	Southern Environmental Law Center
LaTricea D. Adams, MAT, EdS.	CEO & President	Young, Gifted & Green
Ariana Haidari, MS, RD	PhD Candidate	University of Michigan School of Public Health
Carol Ziegler, DNP, FNP-C	Climate, Health and Energy Equity Lab	Vanderbilt University School of Nursing

Additional resources shared by Roundtable participants

Organization	Resources
NAACP	The People's Report - Data Centers in Prince George's County, MD Stop Dirty Data Centers
Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR)	Hyperscale Data Centers: Pollution, Power, and Health
PSR PA	The High Cost of AI: How Data Centers Are Reshaping Pennsylvania's Energy Landscape PSR PA Data Center webpage

Citations

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