

Doctors demand presidential action on climate change

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What's the news: The AMA and 23 other medical organizations declared in a letter to President Donald Trump that “there is no single step that will do more for the health of all Americans than remaining in and meeting our obligations to the Paris Climate Agreement.”

The letter, which states that “climate change is a public health emergency,” was released by the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health. The AMA is a consortium member, as are the National Medical Association, American College of Physicians, and several other state and medical specialty societies representing 600,000 physicians and other health professionals.

Why it matters to patients and physicians: The doctors, nurses and other health professionals who belong to consortium-member organizations are seeing the harms to patient health created by climate change and foresee greater harms to come, the letter says.

“Rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement is not just about preventing the worst of the devastating health harms climate change will bring,” the letter says. “It’s also about seizing this public health crisis and turning it into a major public health opportunity. Climate solutions are health solutions.”

These solutions include more reliance on renewable energy and more efficient use of energy, such as increasing access to affordable mass transit, and “climate-friendly approaches” to agriculture.

“Every one of these steps will save lives, increase productivity and reduce health costs,” the consortium letter states.

Under the agreement, the U.S. pledged to lower national greenhouse gas emissions by 26% to 28% by 2025, compared with 2005 levels.

A few months into his presidency, Trump said he would “cease all implementation” of the Paris agreement. But while the federal government is retreating, many states, counties, cities, businesses and institutions remain committed to continue fighting climate change by reducing their greenhouse

emissions.

The AMA House of Delegates last year reaffirmed environmental policy to support:

- Initiatives to promote environmental sustainability and other efforts to halt global climate change.
- Incorporate principles of environmental sustainability within its business operations.
- Physicians in adopting programs for environmental sustainability in their practices and to help doctors share these concepts with their patients and communities.

The Paris Agreement is “science-based and emphasizes clean energy and pollution reduction, which will improve health immediately and is a crucial tool with the potential to reduce the odds of more dramatic harms to health down the road,” the consortium’s letter says.

The AMA and more than 100 health organizations also signed the consortium’s Climate, Health and Equity Policy Action Agenda that urges “government, business and civil society leaders, elected officials and candidates for office to recognize climate change as a health emergency.”

Because climate change affects health, it is an issue the AMA must address, AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, wrote in an AMA Leadership Viewpoints column.

While some characterize “the growing threat of climate change as somehow not the business of healers—this is shortsighted,” Dr. Harris wrote. “Physician leaders at the AMA are committed to improving health outcomes for patients and shaping the health system of the future. We advance those goals mindful of history and cognizant of the political, social, environmental and economic pressures that impact the health and wellness of our patients.”

What’s next: Despite the president’s action on the Paris Climate Agreement, U.S. withdrawal will not formally take effect until November 2020.