



# Hours of Reality

— Truth in Action —

## Continuing the Conversation: HEALTH

### The Climate Crisis Is a Health Crisis

Today, the World Health Organization calls the climate crisis “the greatest threat to global health in the twenty-first century.”

As medical professionals — physicians, nurse practitioners, and more — we’re on the front lines of this crisis. We’re the ones who understand what dengue moving north means for our patients. We’re the ones in the ER doing everything we can to provide for victims of ever stronger hurricanes and floods. We’re the ones treating kids sick and coughing on soot from endless wildfires. The list goes on.

But some of the most important work we can do doesn’t even require scrubs. After all, our patients trust us to understand what’s happening to their bodies and their environment — and the reasons why. We can help our patients make sense of the crisis and protect their families simply by sharing the scientific consensus.

Just as important, we can help create a healthy future for all by pushing our hospitals, clinics, and other facilities to move beyond the dirty fossil fuels creating this crisis in the first place.

It starts with talking to our colleagues about what’s happening and what we can do. The good news is that it’s easier than you might think. Think of a climate conversation as telling a simple story. Best of all, the basics are just 11 words long:

*We must change. We can change. We will change. Here’s how.*

Below are a set of talking points to help you tell this story to colleagues and patients alike, so everyone understands both the urgency of action and the incredible opportunity we have today.

### WE MUST CHANGE

- **Burning fossil fuels is causing a global climate crisis.** Greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels are causing global temperatures to rise — fast. The result: hurricanes getting stronger, droughts lasting longer, heatwaves turning lethal, and rising seas displacing homes and communities.
- **The climate crisis has become a health crisis planet-wide, stretching providers and resources to the limit.** Catastrophic storms can cost lives and leave thousands injured.

Fossil fuel pollution and warmer temperatures mean allergy and respiratory disease rates are increasing. Infectious diseases are spreading further and faster. Healthcare systems are struggling to adjust.

- **Our most vulnerable patients suffer the most.** Sweltering temperatures and increasing fossil fuel pollution can easily overwhelm young or compromised immune systems in children, the elderly, and the chronically ill. Meanwhile poor families living in substandard housing with limited access to hospitals and resources are typically the worst hit and first forgotten when hurricanes and floods strike.
- **Healthcare is a major contributor to the crisis.** Healthcare accounts [for 4.4 percent of global net emissions, equivalent to 514 coal-fired power plants](#). If healthcare was a country, it would be the fifth-largest polluter on Earth.
- **We have to prepare to face this challenge.** Only around [20 out of 140 medical schools across the US provide courses about climate change or environmental health](#).

#### WE CAN CHANGE

- **With renewables like wind and solar, we can serve our patients without destroying our planet.** Clean energy is affordable and abundant. [More energy from the sun's rays strikes the earth every hour than humanity uses in an entire year](#). [Globally, wind could supply the Earth's electricity needs 40 times over](#).
- **Clean energy is the affordable choice for healthcare.** Already, renewables [are cheaper than fossil fuels for two-thirds of the planet](#) and [experts project most renewables will be cheaper than fossil fuels worldwide by 2020](#). *That's next year.*
- **Change pays for itself.** [As WHO Director of Public Health Dr. Maria Neira said](#), "The health burden of polluting energy sources is now so high, that moving to cleaner and more sustainable choices for energy supply, transport and food systems effectively pays for itself."

#### WE WILL CHANGE

- **The world is with us.** [Seven in 10 Americans support government action on climate](#). [Eight](#)

[in 10 EU citizens want more support for clean energy over fossil fuels](#). Clear majorities worldwide [see climate as the top threat today](#).

- **Healthcare is leading by example with climate-smart facilities that combine low-carbon mitigation and resiliency strategies.** [Albert Einstein Hospital in Sao Paulo, Brazil](#) has undertaken a sustainability master plan that cut annual emissions by 41 percent. South Africa's Western Cape Government health system has committed to reducing emissions 30 percent by 2050, in part by embracing green design principles and eliminating coal and oil-fired generators at almost all its facilities.

#### HERE'S HOW

- **As health professionals, we're trained to reference, scrutinize, and translate scientific evidence for our patients.** We can see and understand the scientific consensus and know this is a crisis. We're also driven and trained to act in times of emergency. It's up to us to inform and lead society on changes that will create a healthier world for us all.
- **2020 will be a year for climate action.** With the reality of the crisis growing more apparent and public demand for action getting louder almost by the day, climate promises to be a major issue in the news next year. Meanwhile, world leaders will meet to create a stronger Paris Agreement.
- **Health professionals can help set an agenda for climate action.** We know Americans are concerned health issues. And we know that as healthcare professionals, we are some of the most trusted voices in the US. In 2020, we can use this power to force the climate-health threat into the national conversation and get elected officials talking about solutions.
- **We can accelerate the clean energy revolution and create a healthier future for our patients.** With climate in the news, there has never been a better time to push our administrations to embrace real sustainability and affordable, practical clean energy solutions. Because if healthcare leads, other fields will follow.