



# Support Climate Change Mitigation and Preparation for People with Disabilities

With its increasing heat, climate variability, natural disaster frequency and severity, and pollution due to wildfire smoke, **climate change is considered the greatest threat to global health of the 21st century.**

Physiatry, also known as physical medicine and rehabilitation, is a medical specialty focused on the care of people who live with chronic disability, a demographic that is rapidly increasing. People with disabling conditions often require complex clinical care due to devastating neurological injury or complicated medical or surgical problems.

**People with disabilities, which includes approximately 26% of the United States population, are disproportionately affected by the health effects of climate change,** and this disparity is expected to worsen without immediate action. They are especially vulnerable to the effects of heat injury, respiratory diseases, heart diseases, strokes, and infectious diseases such as Lyme disease due to climate change.

**The health harms of climate change cost the US more than \$800 billion annually, and these costs will continue to rise.**

CLIMATE EFFECT	HEALTH CONSEQUENCE
Heat	Impaired mobility, communication, and ability to self-regulate temperature make it hard for people with disabilities to escape dangerous heat waves. This leads to <b>increased risk of heat stroke, which can be fatal.</b>
Wildfire smoke/pollutants	<b>Increases risk of lung disease, pneumonia, strokes, heart attacks, and COVID-19.</b>
Natural Disasters	People with disabilities face <b>significant obstacles to evacuation during disasters</b> , including power outages, flooding, debris, limited access to lifesaving medications and supplies, and psychological trauma.
Infectious Disease	Spread of Lyme disease, malaria, and dengue fever

The healthcare system as a whole is one of the largest contributors to emissions and waste in the United States. Healthcare contributes 10% of carbon emissions and 9% of harmful non-greenhouse air pollutants in the US.

## The AAP supports legislation that:

- 1 Reduces carbon emissions, including from the healthcare sector.
- 2 Mitigates the health harms of climate change for people with disabilities.
- 3 Helps the healthcare system prepare for the rising health tolls of climate change through funding for climate change research and education for healthcare workers.
- 4 Includes people with disabilities in the development of climate policy.

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