

Accepted Manuscript

Title: Nurses play essential roles in reducing health problems due to climate change

Author: Jeanne Leffers, Patricia Butterfield

PII: S0029-6554(18)30099-X

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2018.02.008>

Reference: YMNO 1343

To appear in: *Nursing Outlook*



Please cite this article as: Jeanne Leffers, Patricia Butterfield, Nurses play essential roles in reducing health problems due to climate change, *Nursing Outlook* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2018.02.008>.

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American Academy of Nursing**Nurses play essential roles in
reducing health problems due to climate change****Jeanne Leffers, PhD, RN, FAAN****Patricia Butterfield, PhD, RN, FAAN****Environmental and Public Health Expert Panel****Executive Summary:**

Climate change is endangering the stability of the planet's ecological systems and poses untoward risks to the continued survival of humans (Kurth, 2017; Landrigan et al., 2017; Melillo, Richmond and Yohe, 2014; Watts et al., 2017). In our communities, climate change is experienced as increased frequency and intensity of wildfires, heat waves, winter storms, hurricanes, and floods as well as changes in vector distribution. Climate and weather-related conditions affect health conditions as diverse as asthma, sudden cardiac death, premature birth, gastrointestinal illness, depression, malnutrition and vector-borne illness (Landrigan & Sheffield, 2011; Schifino et al, 2013). Nurses play essential roles in public health, clinical care, emergency services, research and advocacy through their work to reduce and respond to the health consequences of climate change.

To minimize the health consequences of climate change and harness the full potential of nurses, both upstream and downstream oriented policies are needed. **Upstream policies** focus on assuring the best possible outcomes for the health of future generations. Specific upstream recommendations address reducing pollution, building resilient communities and increasing the public's understanding of the connection between their health and climate health. **Downstream policies** focus on climate adaptation, disaster response, and the importance of preparing the nursing workforce to address the health consequences of climate change.

Background:

Evidence in support of climate change as a global health threat is unequivocal (World Health Organization, 2015; Watts et al., 2017). Average US temperatures have risen significantly during the past century with the greatest rise in the past 40 years; these changes are altering patterns in rainfall, hurricanes, and ocean acidification (Melillo, Richmond, & Yohe, 2014). Climate change significantly affects health conditions as diverse as asthma, domestic violence, gastrointestinal illness, vector-borne disease, premature birth, and cardiac mortality (Leyva, Beaman, & Davidson, 2017; Sheffield & Landrigan, 2011; Usgcrp, 2016). Climate change poses unequal risk and burdens placed upon those most vulnerable due to biologic and social factors resulting in cascading and multiplicative (Veenema et al, 2017; Watts et al, 2017) consequences. While some of the health consequences of climate change, such as asthma and heat exhaustion, are clearly apparent, many other consequences are harder for nurses to recognize. Adverse impacts upon human health include not only the exacerbation of existing conditions but also the creation of long lasting outcomes to vulnerable infants, children, and unborn fetuses. Pollution, driven by global climate change and other factors, is responsible for three

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