

Wisconsin Environment: Wisconsin health leaders discuss federal climate action

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MADISON — In response to President Joe Biden's [recently announced](#) plans to focus on improving public health and addressing climate change, health leaders from across Wisconsin gathered to discuss the benefits national climate action can have at the local level. The conversation occurred on Monday as part of a [virtual news conference](#) organized by Wisconsin Environment and Wisconsin Health Professionals for Climate Action.

The issues addressed included flooding impacts on communities and switching to renewable energy. The guests included top health care professionals from around the state.

“As a physician, my professional duty is to protect the health of my individual patients, and the public at large,” said Dr. Chirantan Mukhopadhyay, chair of [Wisconsin Environmental Health Professionals for Climate Action](#). “There is [no greater threat to public health than climate change](#). My goal is to educate my peers and others about this grave risk. We must act quickly and decisively to save lives, create a clean economy, and protect the sustainability of life on this planet.”

The panelists explained how the health effects of global warming is sometimes not readily apparent to the public.

“Though people don't always know what to look for, all of us are currently being negatively impacted by climate change, and children and unborn children experience the greatest harms of this health emergency,” said Dr. Andrew Lewandowski, a Madison-area pediatrician with expertise in climate change and

health. In his clinic, Dr. Lewandowski sees children who are harmed by climate change, and he counsels families about how climate change solutions are health solutions.

“A visit to the doctor is not the only thing that will impact our health,” said Rosamaria Martinez, Vice President of Community Health Initiatives (CHI) for the [Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers](#) (SSCHC) in Milwaukee. “There are various interrelated social and environmental factors such as the built environment, the air we breathe, the houses we live in that will affect how long and how well we live.”

These problems not only impact city and suburban dwellers but also rural Wisconsin residents.

“Climate change in rural communities disrupts landscapes and puts untold stresses on people who depend on the land and environment for their livelihoods,” said Mari Freiberg, Chief Executive Officer for [Scenic Bluffs Community Health Centers](#). “In the state’s Driftless region, we have seen repeated “100 year floods” just in the last 10 years. As rural health care providers, we see post-flood illnesses like infection and other respiratory illnesses. But, we also see the impact of chronic and unrelenting stress caused by the size of these events and the landscapes they touch – loss of home and community infrastructure like roads and bridges. A focus on assuring adequate mental health services is essential.”

“We need action now to protect our kids from suffering from the climate health effects regardless if people are rural or in urban areas,” said Dr. Pamela Guthman has spent her career advocating, practicing and teaching about rural community and public health nursing with a focus on the determinants of health, health equity, poverty, environmental, climate and population health. “We simply can no longer wait; we are in a public health crisis and every one of us will suffer from the health effects from climate change without broad climate health policy changes.”

In a [report](#) last November, Wisconsin Environment Research & Policy Center laid out a transformative vision for stronger, more sustainable national infrastructure that would support public health, the environment and build a future powered by clean energy.

“Outdated infrastructure that needs repair, revamping or replacement adversely affects every single Wisconsinite,” said Megan Severson, State Director with

[Wisconsin Environment](#). “So much of the United States was built in the 19th and 20th centuries with a lack of knowledge of the environmental and health impacts — and with fossil fuels in mind. It’s long past time to repair our existing roads, revamp our energy production with renewable sources and move to clean forms of transportation to protect our health.”