

Strengthening Efforts to Address Climate Change and Ensure a Healthy, Equitable Future

The past year was one of climate progress in the U.S. In August 2022, the U.S. passed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) which, alongside the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act, is enabling potentially transformative investments in clean energy, electrification, community resilience, and environmental justice. These investments could dramatically reduce air pollution, limit the health impacts of climate change, and catalyze additional action (Figure 2). By 2030, the IRA is estimated to reduce economy-wide CO₂ emissions by 35–43% below 2005 levels, and reduce electric power sector emissions 49–83% below 2005 levels.^{41,42} States around the country are also passing climate change legislation in energy, transportation, buildings, and other sectors.^{43,44}

Despite these gains, the U.S. remains a leading contributor to global GHG and particulate air pollution emissions and has among the highest per capita CO₂ emissions in the world, surpassing China (Indicator 4.2.5, Table 1).⁴⁵ Accelerating towards zero emissions as rapidly as possible will result in immense health benefits through improved air quality and by limiting climate change, while every fraction of a degree of heating will worsen health outcomes and health inequities.^{46,47}

This is a critical moment to secure and build on this recent progress. The health community can play a leading role, both in ensuring the IRA and other climate policies are successful in the face of political threats and in advancing the health- and equity-oriented implementation of climate policies.

Recommendations for Promoting Health and Equity through Climate Action

A rapid transition away from fossil fuels is needed to save lives, protect health and wellbeing, avoid the worst impacts of climate change, and maintain a healthy environment. The U.S. Brief highlights four priority areas for action.

1

Take action to reduce air pollution, simultaneously reducing the health risks from fossil fuels and reducing GHG emissions.

2

Protect health from future climate change by ending fossil fuel exploration and extraction, rapidly phasing out fossil fuel use, and ending fossil fuel subsidies.

3

Make protecting and enhancing human health a central consideration in the transition to renewable, non-combustion energy.

4

Invest in adaptation to protect people's health from the harms of climate change.
