

APA's Response to the Global Climate Change Crisis

More than a decade ago, the American Psychological Association examined the role of psychology in understanding and responding to climate change in the report of its Task Force on the Interface Between Psychology and Global Climate Change (APA, 2009; "Psychology and global climate change," 2011). Following that report, the Council of Representatives adopted as APA policy the Resolution on Affirming Psychologists' Role in Addressing Global Climate Change (APA, 2011), which serves as the foundation of the association's work on the topic.

Among its efforts, APA has sponsored the review and dissemination of research on the mental health impacts of climate change (Clayton, Manning, & Hodge, 2014; Clayton et al., 2017). In 2017, APA became an observer organization of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and, in that role, sends representatives to IPCC meetings and nominates contributors and reviewers for IPCC reports. Further, APA cohosted the 2019 International Summit on Psychology and Global Health in Portugal, which was designed to advance the contribution of psychology to United Nations Sustainable Goal 13 ("Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts") (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). At this summit, representatives of 44 national and international psychological associations signed a resolution committing their organizations to action on climate change ("Resolution," 2019).

Current scientific evidence strongly indicates that climate change has become a crisis: unless major reductions are made in emissions of greenhouse gases due to human activities, average surface temperatures on Earth are projected to increase within the next 30 years to 1.5 degrees C. above pre-industrial levels, with serious impacts on life throughout the planet (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018; Otto et al., 2020). The negative impacts of climate change on the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and nations are growing more frequent and severe, with members of some groups – including persons of color, persons of lower socioeconomic status, women, older adults, children, and persons with disabilities – at greater risk than others (Clayton, Manning, Krygsman, & Speiser, 2017; Lancet, 2019; U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2016, 2018; World Health Organization, 2019). The health and survival of nonhuman animals are threatened by climate change as well (Graham, Matthews, & Turner, 2016; Radchuk et al., 2019).

Recent research on the psychological dimensions of climate change can guide new action to mitigate and promote human adaptation to climate change. Among the areas that have been investigated are beliefs, attitudes, and communications about climate change and about policies and practices for addressing it; behavior change regarding energy use and conservation; and mental health and psychosocial consequences of climate change

and related natural disasters, including pathways to coping and resilience (see bibliography below).

Building on such work, APA can further address the climate change crisis by promoting and sponsoring advances in research; interventions; services; education and training; public policy, law, and advocacy; group and community organization; and other domains in which psychologists work. All areas of psychology have valuable knowledge and experience to contribute to this effort.

THEREFORE, APA reaffirms its 2011 policy resolution and commits itself to continued action to address global climate change on the basis of scientific evidence and applied and clinical psychological expertise.

FURTHER, APA adopts an interdisciplinary and interprofessional approach to addressing climate change, including collaborations with other scientific, professional, policy, and community organizations in the United States and internationally.

FURTHER, the President of APA shall appoint a task force, composed of leading international experts, to review APA's past and current activities related to global climate change and to recommend goals and strategies for future APA activities that will have a strong impact on the climate change crisis. The Council of Representatives requests that the task force keep in mind the prime importance of issues surrounding migration, human rights, and systemic aspects (including political, economic, and corporate) of climate change, as well as address how APA can improve its own sustainability practices. The task force will submit a report to the Council, and the report will be disseminated to the membership of APA.

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(Note: This list, prepared in February 2020, is not intended to be exhaustive.)

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