



**AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION**

February 3, 2021

Ms. Gina McCarthy  
National Climate Advisor  
Office of Domestic Climate Policy  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), I write to congratulate you on your recent appointment as President Biden’s National Climate Advisor and to offer APA’s support and assistance in the federal effort to address the climate change crisis. APA is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States, with more than 121,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students as its members and international affiliates.

APA applauds the Biden administration’s strong commitment to action on climate change, as exemplified by the January 27 executive order on the climate crisis. We especially appreciate its whole-of-government approach that sees nearly all sectors of federal activity as falling within climate policy. These include not only the environment, energy, and transportation sectors but also others such as agriculture, economy, education, health, housing, justice, labor, and national security. Psychologists work as researchers and practitioners in all these sectors and are poised to contribute to climate action within them at policy and program levels.

We also appreciate President Biden’s “Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking” and its reference to the 2015 executive order on “Using Behavioral Science Insights to Better Serve the American People.” These documents provide a strong foundation for effective climate policy.

Our association is formally committed to mobilizing the knowledge and skills of psychologists to respond to climate change and to improve the health and well-being of people of this and future generations.<sup>1</sup> In this letter, I briefly outline the work that psychologists and APA are pursuing on climate change.

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<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association (2020). APA’s response to the global climate change crisis [Resolution adopted by Council of Representatives]. (<https://www.apa.org/about/policy/climate-change-crisis>)

Adams, Z. (2020). Increasing action on climate change. *Monitor on Psychology*, 51(1), 48. (<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/01/cover-trends-climate-change>)

The climate crisis is the result of human behaviors and solving it will require modifying those behaviors. Psychological scientists have identified factors that shape the climate-relevant behaviors of individuals, organizations, and communities and have designed strategies to help people to alter those behaviors. Their work has also shed light on how people comprehend and respond to information about climate change and how researchers and policymakers can communicate about it in ways that enhance people's understanding and motivate them to take individual and collective action. Much of the foundational research in this area was described in a peer-reviewed APA [task force report](#) published in the *American Psychologist* in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Further advances have been reported since then in scientific journals published by APA and other organizations.

There is growing recognition that climate change can have negative impacts on social relationships, mental health, and brain development. These impacts are generally tied to the effects of heat, disasters, and disease and are often greatest among groups that also face other challenges, including communities of color and communities that are economically disadvantaged. In partnership with ecoAmerica, APA has documented these impacts in two major reports,<sup>3</sup> the first of which served as an important source for the 2016 U.S. [Climate and Health Assessment](#). An updated report is in the planning stage. Also, APA is collaborating with other U.S. health organizations to design and advocate for public health policies and programs that will strengthen community-based psychological resilience in the face of climate change, in order to prevent negative mental health consequences and to facilitate early interventions when needed.<sup>4</sup>

APA works at the international level as well. It is an official observer organization at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which has led to greater involvement of psychologists in drafting and reviewing IPCC reports (e.g., the chapter on “Health, wellbeing and the changing structure of communities” in the forthcoming Sixth Assessment Report). In addition, APA was a lead organizer of the 2019 [International Summit on Psychology and Global Health: A Leader in Climate Action](#), at which representatives of 44 national and international psychological associations committed to act collaboratively to address climate change. These associations now exchange research findings, national and community experiences, and policy proposals, and are planning to participate jointly in future international gatherings such as the 26th UN Climate Change Conference.

To chart the next stage of APA's work on climate change, we recently convened a [task force](#) of leading psychologists and other professionals. Among the themes that have emerged from the task force's initial deliberations are: (a) environmental justice must be an essential component of all climate change policy; (b) migration and other population displacements arising from climate change are emerging as major

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<sup>2</sup> Psychology and global climate change [Special issue]. (2011). *American Psychologist*, 66(4). (<https://psycnet.apa.org/PsycARTICLES/journal/amp/66/4>)

<sup>3</sup> Clayton, S., Manning, C. M., & Hodge, C. (2014). *Beyond storms and droughts: The psychological impacts of climate change*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica. ([https://ecoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/eA\\_Beyond\\_Storms\\_and\\_Droughts\\_Psych\\_Impacts\\_of\\_Climate\\_Change.pdf](https://ecoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/eA_Beyond_Storms_and_Droughts_Psych_Impacts_of_Climate_Change.pdf))

Clayton, S., Manning, C. M., Krygsman, K., & Speiser, M. (2017). *Mental health and our changing climate: Impacts, implications, and guidance*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica. (<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> Belkin, G. (2020). Leadership for the social climate. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 382, 1975-1977. (<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2001507>)

social and health challenges; and (c) education and communication efforts on climate change should be strengthened and expanded to a broader range of audiences and settings. The task force is exploring additional ideas and will release its full report later this year.

Over the last year, we have shared much of APA's work with members of Congress, including, in the House of Representatives, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology; the Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change; and the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition. We will continue to educate Congress on the important role of psychological science in addressing climate change.

We at APA offer our assistance and expertise in psychological science as you and your colleagues develop and implement new federal climate policies. For additional information or discussion, feel free to contact Dr. Howard Kurtzman, APA's Senior Science Advisor, at [hkurtzman@apa.org](mailto:hkurtzman@apa.org) or 202-491-4567.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arthur C. Evans, Jr.', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Arthur C. Evans, Jr., Ph.D.  
Chief Executive Officer