



Global Health Institute
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES AT THE INTERSECTION OF HEALTH AND CLIMATE DURING THE COMING YEAR

A letter from Jonathan Patz, MD, M.P.H.

Director, UW-Madison Global Health Institute

Dear friends and colleagues,

Environmental protection has provided great health benefits, and we've seen substantial reductions in disease rates across the globe. But, across my 20-year career, it is clear that these **health gains are being undermined by global climate change**, from heat waves and weather disasters to childhood asthma, malnutrition, and emerging infectious diseases. Not enough people understand the documented links between climate change and risks to our health, environment, and economy.

The urgency of the global climate crisis was apparent in December, 2015, when a record number of world leaders convened in Paris for the United Nations' 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) on Climate Change and approved a historic climate change agreement. Business and health care leaders joined them to also deliver a **unified call for a healthy low-carbon economy**. More than 80 of the world's largest cities, representing an aggregate population of 600 million people, have joined in the **C40 Cities** Climate Leadership Group to share best practices to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. R20 Regions of Climate Action, a coalition of regional governments, is also promoting projects to reduce energy consumption, improve local economies, and create new green jobs.

Confronting global climate change demands a full-court-press of science-based evidence from every sector to rapidly change our current dangerous path. Environmental and economic arguments alone are not moving climate change policies fast enough. **Concern for our own health usually hits home for everyone.** I believe bringing a health lens to the problems of and solutions to climate change not only complements the environmental and economic efforts but will find more common ground and interest across diverse constituencies. The likely end result: policy and actions that move faster and further.

This is precisely where we fit in: **Our research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Global Health Institute builds the quantitative evidence for health-based decision making on climate change.**

Our latest studies extend beyond climate-health risks. In fact, we're finding that **actions taken today** to confront climate change add up to enormous **health opportunities**. Consider, for example, the

rising rates of chronic diseases (including diabetes, obesity, cancer, and heart disease) in nearly every region of the world. Many of these diseases are linked to fossil fuel combustion, whether the result of air quality, sedentary lifestyles, or high-meat diets.

Recent attention on the need for major investments in infrastructure present golden opportunities to expand our work demonstrating that redesigned neighborhoods and cities can promote human and planetary health. By designing communities that promote “active transport” (safe walking and cycling), we, in essence, encourage better blood flow in the arteries of our cardiovascular systems, rather than catering to the traffic flow along asphalt arteries.

In this post-Paris Agreement period, **there is no better time to invest in building health-based evidence** to help accelerate informed, effective action on climate mitigation. We want to expand our work, showing how specific actions will improve health and demonstrating the health benefits that will emerge from a low-carbon society.

Our work is not done. This year will be critical as we refocus the climate discussion to include health. I invite you to be part of this important work, for the health of all of us and our world.

Together, we can make our planet healthier,

Professor Jonathan Patz
Director, [University of Wisconsin-Madison Global Health Institute](#)
John P. Holton Chair in Health and the Environment

P.S. Please consider making a gift to GHI today to help us build the case that shows the health benefits of an energy efficient economy. You can give to GHI online [here](#), or contact Kimberly Santiago by [email](#) or at 608-265-9608 to discuss how you can make a difference. All gifts, no matter their size, are welcome and appreciated.