

**MONTANA HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
FOR A HEALTHY CLIMATE**

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

| Cover image: Mission mountains viewed from the Bison Range, taken by Henry Mulligan.

Introduction

Season's greetings, friends! Another orbit on our beautiful blue marble has gone by, and MTHPHC is stronger than ever thanks to you. Here's a recap of what we did together this year.

We started off the year nurturing those critical cross-disciplinary, cross-organizational connections at our very first annual Climate & Health in the 406 conference, and what a conference it was! Our gratitude goes out to our esteemed speakers for inspiring us with their passionate work on climate change, healthcare sustainability, mental health, and wildfire smoke – and an equal measure of admiration for the many volunteers who made the day go smoother than we thought a first try could! Thank you to every one of the seventy folks who attended – your comments, discussions, and warmheartedness were the most valuable part of the day. We hope you're ready for the next one!

Education on the connection between climate and health remained a major focus this year. We continued our Multifaceted Education Campaign, this time with the launch of our online Health Toolkit. This is your one-stop resource for information on protecting your health, your patients' health, and your hospital community's health from climate change. Our waiting room banners, the first part of our campaign, were completed and made the rounds to eight different partner locations! We also had over 60 people graduate from the Climate Change & Human Health course this year, provided in conjunction with the Montana Public Health Training Center, bringing the total to over 300 graduates. In addition to our 47 presentations around the state, our webinar series was also launched this year, and folks came prepared with thoughtful questions and observations! Thanks to everyone who took the time to dive deep into climate and health. We are so grateful to you all, and to our astute presenters.

We also provided education to our legislators this year, providing expert witness testimony at 14 different key moments in Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Billings Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) hearings. In one case we had the most comments (proportional to our population) of any state! Thanks to everyone who submitted a comment this year, making our state a powerhouse of climate action.

This year, sixteen young Montanans made legislative history in the landmark case *Held v. State of Montana*. Judge Seeley ruled wholly in favor of the plaintiffs' assertion that a recent change to Montana law that forbid the Montana EPA from considering greenhouse gas emissions in environmental reviews was unconstitutional. The judge also found that Montana's emissions do matter in the face of global climate change, and that Montana's children are disproportionately harmed by this. MTHPHC board members worked with Our Children's Trust at the capital during the weeklong trial to support plaintiffs and testify as expert witnesses on the health harms of climate change. We are so proud of the plaintiffs, and we know they're only getting started.

And so are we! Folks, we hit a THOUSAND members this year! What a milestone. All of you remain so important for this effort. Thank you for being with us.

Happy new year,

Caspen Black
Program Coordinator
they/them

2023 Highlights



Mission

As Montana health professionals, we address the causes and impacts of climate change to protect and enhance the health of all Montanans through education, advocacy and leadership.

We educate **patients and providers**, we advocate for our patients' health to **policymakers**, and we lead collaborative efforts with **top health industry partners**. In the following sections, you'll see our actions broken down into these arenas of action.

Climate & Health Education



Climate Health Toolkit

We launched a new facet of our Multifaceted Education Campaign this year: our online Health Toolkit!

Each section of our toolkit has been thoroughly researched by our team, led by graduate researcher Julia Ryder, RN. Each section is divided into Patient, Provider, and Administrator

tabs so you can navigate right to the most useful steps you can take. Some favorites include instructions for making a cheap DIY HEPA box fan, our library of mostly open-access provider reading on the health effects of wildfire smoke, and our HEPA filter distribution program in coordination with pharmacy administrators. More to come!

Online Course

The Climate Change & Human Health in Montana course is a free, online, self-paced deep dive into climate and health, produced in collaboration with the Montana Public Health Training Center. This year, we hit over 300 graduates since the program's beginning three years ago. That represents over 3000 hours of dedicated learning from participants! Most important, though, is that 300 health professionals in our state now have a deep knowledge of the way climate change works, how it affects human health, and how to talk about that with patients.

Webinars

We launched our webinar series, *Vulnerable Montana Populations: Preventing Climate-Related Harm*, this year to great success. Our first webinar was *The Elderly and Climate Change* with Dr Spike Pueringer, MD, FACP. Our second webinar was *Racial and Ethnic Minorities – Disproportionately Affected by Climate Change* with Julia Ryder, RN. Both webinars were packed with specific and useful information, and concluded with thoughtful conversations with attendees sharing their own experiences. We look forward to the next webinars in the series, and thank our co-sponsor Confluence Public Health Alliance and our funder, the Montana Office of Rural Health and Area Health Education (AHEC).

We also co-sponsored Families for a Livable Climate's *Federal Dollars for Montana Schools Part II: Success Stories in Electric Buses, Solar Power & Energy*, and UMT's Friday Medical Conference webinar on *Climate Change and Health*.

Collegiate and Residency Education

MTHPHC members are active educators for the next generation of health professionals. This year members taught courses for several institutions:

- At the Western Montana Clinic, members taught family medicine residents.
- At Riverstone Health in Billings, members taught family medicine residents.
- At the UW School of Medicine: Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho (WWAMI), members taught courses for medical students.
- At the University of Montana, members taught classes for students in the Climate Change Studies program, Pharmacy program, and the Davidson Honors College. One course of note was our Climate Change and Public Health field course in Mongolia.
- At Johns Hopkins, members taught Energy Policy Masters students.
- At MSU, we taught environmental health, nursing, nutrition, and risk management classes.
- At Montana Tech, we taught environmental studies students.

Courses and classes like these ensure that health professionals of tomorrow are prepared for the novel health challenges of climate change.



Members speak at the American Institute of Chemical Engineers (AIChE) Climate Conference.

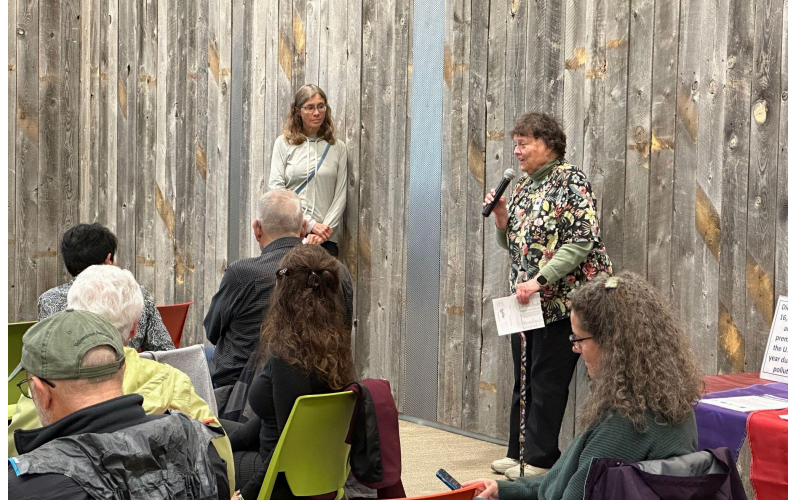
Outreach

Sometimes, you have to take the news to the people. Below are times we brought health information directly to the folks who needed it. Many of the 2000+ hours volunteered by members this year were for outreach!

In the Press

Our dedicated communications committee wrote seven thoughtful pieces this year, published in twenty-one newspapers across the state. Additionally, our actions generated press 37 times this year, including print newspapers, televised news, society newsletters, Montana Public Radio, and podcasts. Fun fact: four of those appearances were in Mongolian news outlets, thanks to our field course with the American Center for Mongolian Studies.

We also continued our work with MSU's Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity spread the word about the 2021 Climate Change and Human Health report.



Dr. Lori Byron and Carole Baumann (right) discuss climate health at the Billings Public Library following a showing of the four short films created for the Climate Change & Human Health report.

Our media work continues as co-sponsors of Families for a Livable Climate's "Montana Climate Stories" initiative, which published twenty six written stories and eleven recordings this year. Each story documents our changing world and reflects on our reactions to it. We hope that these stories create common ground and spur collective action for Montana's climate and people.



Left: Members gather for Ride for Their Lives to bike around Billings and discuss ways to make

healthcare more climate-friendly.

Right: Children who entered our art contest display their winning pictures for proud family members. The contest asked kids to imagine a world of clear skies and clean lands that we can all enjoy!

Presentations

Members gave 47 presentations this year, including at UMT and MSU, Montana medical societies, community and faith groups, and national and international meetings. Some highlights include Hayley Blackburn presenting at Life Long Learning in Pharmacy (an international pharmacy conference for pharmacy educators), Rob and Lori Byron and JoRee LaFrance presenting at the International Indigenous Child and Health Conference, and Rob and Lori and Dr. Alex Adams presenting at the International One Earth, One Health, One With Summit. Montana is part of the global effort to slow climate change, and we were so lucky to meet our allies all over the globe this year, as well as many more in our own neighborhoods.



Rikki Held, a plaintiff in *Held v. Montana*, shares her experiences for a crowd at the Pub Station in Billings, following a showing of the film *Youth v. Gov.*

Tabling

Members tabled at seven events this year, including: Billings Earth Day, Billings Climate Week, a Billings Documentary showing of *Juliana vs US*, a Missoula library wildfire smoke event, the American Academy of Pediatrics meeting, at a local Patagonia store, at the Billings Clean Energy Fair, and the Billings Montanans Talk Climate event. Thank you to everyone who hosted us!

Advocacy

Held v. Montana

In March of 2020, sixteen young plaintiffs sued the state of Montana for an unconstitutional provision in the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) that prohibits the state from considering the impacts of climate change when making decisions about which projects to permit. This year, they finally got their day (or rather, week) in court. We were right beside them, cheering for them on their way to the courtroom each day, holding an event in Helena to share information about the trial, and even taking the stand as expert witnesses.



Left: Climate Health banners displayed with Our Children's Trust, the nonprofit legal team who represented the *Held v. Montana* plaintiffs. Right: MTHPHC members cheered on plaintiffs as they entered the courtroom every day of the trial.

Dr. Lori Byron provided expert testimony on the disproportionate effects of climate change on children's health, Dr. Rob Byron provided written testimony, and Dr. Jennifer Robohm was on retainer as a mental health expert.

Thanks to the vision of these determined young people, the leadership of nonprofit law firm Our Children's Trust, and the insight of the judge, this landmark case now represents the first successful children's climate trial in U.S. history.

Testimony

Testifying as an expert witness is one of the most heavy-hitting ways for health professionals to use our voices for good – it's a time commitment, and we are so grateful to the members who showed up and shared their expertise with our legislature and courts. At least fifteen members testified before Montana legislature this year, and *Held v. Montana* is just one example out of six hearings (federal, state, and local) where we were called to testify in 2023. Many of these hearings had to do with our developing energy grid and the emissions that can be reduced or increased based on our choices.

Public Comment

Members commented on at least nine bills (federal, state, and local) this year. One important moment was the 183 of us that signed on to a letter to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality regarding their permitting system's part in state emissions. Another highlight was our group's comments on the EPA's new power plan: we were the most engaged climate group of any state. Way to get engaged, everybody! We also met with the offices of Senators Tester and Daines to speak about air pollution and children's health, and asked them not to require airports to continue to sell leaded aviation gasoline.

Collaborative Leadership

Community-building Events

Our biggest event this year, of course, was our first annual *Climate Change & Human Health in the 406* conference. This is the first conference in Montana to bring together health professionals for climate health. We left it feeling invigorated by our expert speakers and our caring community. We can't wait for the next one! The conference coincided with a Rotunda Day we held at the state capitol to introduce ourselves to legislators and ask for their consideration of this issue.



Dr. Lisa Patel speaks at our first annual conference. Her overview of climate and health, as well as the other lectures from the conference, can be viewed on our Youtube channel.



Members stand in the rotunda of the Helena capitol building before our rotunda lunch, hosted to get to know our legislators and share our knowledge of climate and health.

Other highlights included our k-12 art contest in collaboration with Montana Audubon and the first annual Youth Climate Summit hosted by the Park High Green Initiative in Livingston. In addition, we co-sponsored seven events around the state including documentary showings, conferences, workshops, and more. We feel these moments of connection and discussion are vital for the strength of our community. Thanks for joining us!



Dedicated young climate activists discuss their hopes and strategies at the first annual Youth Climate Summit hosted by the Park High Green Initiative, which we co-sponsored.

Co-signatories

Our organization joined forces with fellow nonprofits like Forward Montana, the Western Environmental Law Center, the Montana Chapter Sierra Club, and the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health to send letters to the City of Helena, the USDA, the MT DEQ, and COP28, showing broad organized support for climate action across professional sectors.

Honors

We gratefully acknowledge recognition from organizations we admire this year.

- We were invited to the Patagonia Tools for Grassroots Activists conference, one of a narrow selection of nonprofits from around the world who came together to build our skills under the tutelage of some world-renowned experts. What an incredible experience!
- We were semifinalists in ecoAmerica's 2023 American Climate Leadership Awards. The purpose of the award is to recognize and share best practices on climate change advocacy and action nationwide. You may know ecoAmerica as the folks behind ClimateRx. It was an honor to be among such good company!

Coalitions

This year MTHPHC participated in the following coalitions:

- Electrify Montana
- Montana Climate Action Coalition
- EV School Bus state-wide coalition

Fundraising

We are thankful to all our donors, who set a record this year for the most donations we have ever received. Thank you for making all of this possible and for proving how much Montanans care about having a healthy climate.

This year we are also grateful to acknowledge grants from Region VIII Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU), the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), the Montana Area Health Education Center (AHEC), and the Billings Community Foundation. Their generosity of spirit and vision allowed us to expand our work into more of the state and become more effective advocates for change.

Thank you for your active support over the past year. Whether you donated, attended an event, put one on, or just read our newsletter each month – none of this would be possible without you. We wish you health and happiness in 2024!



Folks share their visions for the future of Montana's energy at the Billings Clean Energy fair.