

**MONTANA HEALTH PROFESSIONALS  
FOR A HEALTHY CLIMATE**

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**ANNUAL REPORT**

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**2024**

## 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 climate, health and environmental justice partners. In the following sections, you'll see our actions broken down into these arenas of action.

## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the work we do here at Montana HPHC. We had some exciting victories in 2024, thanks to the energy of our dedicated board members who donated over 2500 hours and our brand-new volunteer program, the Climate Health Stewards. As always, our strategy for climate health is three-pronged: we use education, advocacy, and leadership to accomplish our goals.

2024 was a busy year for education. Thanks to a grant from the CO2 Foundation, we were able to nearly triple our output of thoughtful editorial pieces for local newspapers. We also started our own TV show! *Our Planet, Our Health* launched on December 19th on the Billings Community 7 Television Station.

Despite the lack of a legislative session, we were busy with advocacy work this year. After the final rule was released in May 2024, in coalition with the Montana Environmental Education Center (MEIC), we worked diligently to protect the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS). Through a series of op-eds, letters-to-the-editor and public media appearances we highlighted the health benefits associated with the stronger standards for both elected officials and the public.

Leadership for us means individual leadership development as well as coalition-building. When we launched our new volunteer program, the Climate Health Stewards, we could not have anticipated the generosity with which our members gave of their time. Despite the busy lives of health professionals, Stewards spent hundreds of hours educating patients, advocating for environmental standards, and developing coalitions which will further the health voice in climate.

We start 2025 energized for the work ahead, knowing it has never been more crucial. We hope you'll join us.

With gratitude,  
Casper Black  
Program Coordinator

# Education

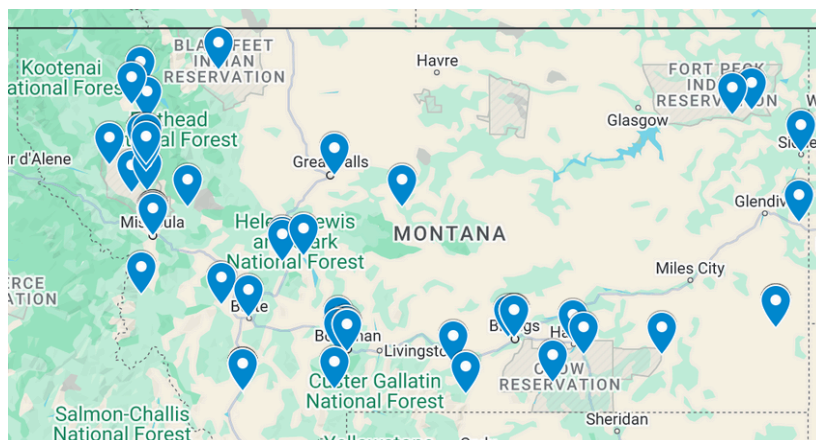
## Climate Health Toolkit

We finished this important bedrock for our climate & health education this year. Each section of our online toolkit is thoroughly researched by our team, led by Julia Ryder, RN. Each section is divided into Patient, Provider, and Administrator tabs so everyone can easily find the most useful steps they can take. Some favorites include instructions for making an affordable DIY HEPA box fan, our patient information on easy ways to protect yourself from the dust, poor water quality and stress that come along with droughts, and our library of mostly open-access studies for clinicians on the health effects of extreme heat.

## EPA Air Quality Flags

The flag program helps communicate daily air quality conditions with colored flags that correspond to the EPA's Air Quality Index. This is a highly visible way to generate public awareness about outdoor air conditions. On days with poor air quality levels, participating organizations can use this information to reduce exposure to air pollution and keep children safe.

We helped three new sites start their Air Quality Flag programs this year: Billings West High School, Eagle Mount in Bozeman, and the Sheridan Montana Public Health Department. This was thanks to the dedication of our Outreach Coordinator, Julia Ryder, RN, who spent many hours assisting sites in setting up their programs. This brings the total number of participating sites up to 61.



Map of EPA Air Quality Flag sites as of Jan 2025. The interactive map can be viewed at: [tinyurl.com/airflags](https://tinyurl.com/airflags)



Miss Montana USA Ava Williams visits our table at the MREA Clean Energy Fair in Billings, 8/24/24.

## Tabling

We tabled at thirteen different events this year to promote climate health solutions. Volunteers handed out educational materials and answered questions about how to stay healthy during extreme heat, smoke, drought, and more. We nearly doubled our tabling events from last year thanks to our growing partnerships, especially among agricultural organizations. Thank you to everyone who hosted us!



Boys & Girls Club member reading the EPA's book on Air Quality Flags ("Why is Coco Red?") to fellow club members, 4/28/24.

## Youth Education

The youth are the future, and it's the youngest among us who are some of the most impacted by climate change. Thanks to a partnership with Boys & Girls Club of Missoula, we launched a pilot program this year for afterschool programs to teach kids how to protect their health and the planet. We put together a weeklong series of books and activities for club participants to grow their knowledge and their climate communication abilities. Kids and staff loved it, and we are looking forward to expanding the program in 2025!

## Presentations

Our dedicated volunteers presented to 41 organizations this year, including both state universities, Montana health professional societies, community and faith groups, and national and international meetings. Some highlights this year include Drs. Lori and Rob Byron at the annual meeting of the Montana Public Health Association, Dr. Hayley Blackburn at the annual meeting of the Medical Society Consortium



Dr. Jen Robohm speaks about mental health and wildfire smoke at the Rocky Mountain Wildfire Symposium, 10/17/24.

on Climate and Health, Dr. Beth Schenk at the American Nurses Association Climate Week, and Dr. Jen Robohm at the Rocky Mountain Wildfire Smoke Symposium. 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.



Drs. Lori and Rob Byron (left) and Julia Ryder, RN (right) on the set of "Our Planet, Our Health", 12/19/24.

## In the Press

Our communication team was very active this year, more than doubling our output to 21 thoughtfully-written editorial pieces published a total of 52 times in newspapers across the state. Members were also interviewed for newspapers at least nine times. Members were guests on radio shows and podcasts eight times, as well as airing multiple radio public service announcements on heat safety, written and produced by our Yale Climate Change & Health intern, Hannah Mark.

After appearing on local television channels six times this year, we took the leap and started our own show! "Our Planet, Our Health" premiered on Dec. 19th. Tune in Thursdays at 6PM at and

catch up on past episodes at the Billings Community 7 Television website, under *Archived Programs*.

## Webinar series

In partnership with the MT Area Health Education Center and Confluence Public Health Alliance, we produced a fantastic webinar series entitled *Montana Populations: Preventing Climate-Related Harm*. This series launched in late 2023 and continued into May of this year. All webinars are available on our YouTube channel.

## Banners

Last year, we developed a series of floor-standing banners for patient education. This year, they've done a circuit of eleven clinics and hospitals, from Missoula to Miles City! Riverstone Health Clinic was even inspired to create their own set of banners for permanent display. We also took copies of the banners to tabling events across the state (see the tabling section above). The banners explain the basics of climate's effects on our lungs, our pregnancies, our body temperature regulation, and more.



Banners and air quality flag at the Western Montana Clinic in Missoula, 1/24.



Banners at Holy Rosary Hospital in Miles City, MT, 7/24.

## Advocacy

In years where the Montana state legislature doesn't meet, we focus our advocacy efforts toward federal and state environmental standards.

### Testimony



Dr Anita Lowe on KTVH News as she testifies before the PSC, 4/8/24.

One of the best ways health professionals can use their position as a trusted expert is to testify before policymakers. Members were very active this year, giving testimony before the US Office of Management and Budget, the MT Public Service Commission (PSC), the Laurel City Council, and the Montana Consumer Council.

If you heard about the PSC in the news a lot this year, it's because forty Montana organizations and businesses signed a petition in February asking the PSC to require consideration of climate impacts when they regulate utilities. The PSC received hundreds of comments, and the issue snowballed into a major point of conversation in the PSC elections in November.

Another win was the EPA's implementation of strong Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) in 2024, thanks in part to constant comments and testimony from health professionals across the country, including Montana HPHC.. We will continue to support standards to protect Montana's health.

### Coalition-Building in DC

Several members journeyed to Washington, DC this year for the annual meetings of the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health, the Medical Students for a Sustainable Future, and to meet with the congressional delegation for Montana. Board member Dr. Hayley Blackburn presented to the Consortium on "Preparing Vulnerable Populations for 2024 Heat Waves," and board members Drs. Lori and Rob Byron appeared on a Climate Health Equity Advocacy panel at the Student meeting.

*Held v. Montana* plaintiffs made history in 2023 when it became the first constitutional climate trial in the United States. Montana's constitution guarantees the right to a healthy, clean environment. Three of our board members supplied testimony and our members showed



Dr. Rob Byron attends a Council on Environmental Quality meeting at the White House, 2/14/24.

up to support the young plaintiffs when *Held v. Montana* was going through the courts. The suit was appealed to the Montana Supreme Court this year. The importance of healthcare voices was substantiated when the public health amicus brief was the only brief cited in the Montana Supreme Court decision to uphold the lower court's decision, affirming our constitutional rights to a clean and healthy environment.

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## Leadership

Climate work is most effective when we do it together. Our work focuses on building networks of climate health leaders who can be strong advocates and educators.

## Climate Health Stewards

Researchers from George Mason University found that while **90%** of health professionals felt they had a responsibility to bring attention to the health effects of climate change, they sometimes felt held back by their knowledge of the subject, their limited time, and social anxiety around advocacy. We started a volunteer program to bring together people ready to take the leap into action. Stewards have a cohort of peers to rely on, the support of our staff, and our unending gratitude for their commitment to climate action! In our first year, 70 people signed up. Stewards testified to help get the stronger EPA Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) enacted and to protect them, presented 40+ times last year to diverse professional groups and community organizations, engaged one-on-one about climate health with over 150 patients, and hosted banners and air quality flags in their clinics (see Education section).

## Coalitions

In 2024 Montana HPHC members worked on many projects with our allied organizations:

- With the Electrify Montana coalition, members participated on panel discussion on energy-efficient homes and worked on a Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) proposal for the state to reduce school energy costs.
- Worked on the Organizing Coalition for Billings Climate Week.
- Joined the Northwest Montana Climate Network.
- The Montana Environmental Information Center was instrumental in our joint work to promote the new EPA MATS.
- Helped form Montanans for the Future, a new coalition that meets weekly to collectively address climate change in Montana.
- Worked with the Center for American Indian and Rural Health Excellence (CAIRHE) on a National Cancer Institute grant to query rural patients and providers about how they want to receive information about climate and extreme weather.
- The Montana Academy of Family Practitioners became our newest allied Montana medical society.

## Community Building Events

We enjoyed time with allies new and old at events this year, from conversations after our webinars, to swapping advocacy advice at our conference, to sharing lunch at an electric school bus test drive. Our annual events, Ride for their Lives and the Climate & Health in the 406 Conference, saw excellent attendance. In total, we organized twenty events this year, including many collaborations with partner organizations.



Dr. Brian Harrington presenting on OR sustainability at our annual conference, 4/13/24.



Climate Health Stewards gather after our conference, 4/13/24.

## Fundraising

### Donors

Donors are cornerstone partners in our work, and we are grateful to them. Eighty-one donors contributed over \$25k to our work this year – crucial funding that supported our education campaigns, our volunteer program, and more. Several donors contributed to our new endowment fund, which will support our work in years to come.

### Grants

Montana HPHC received funding from the CO2 Foundation, the National Integrated Drought Information System, the OP and WE Edwards Foundation, the National Cancer Institute, and the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (Region VIII) in 2024.

Additionally, our annual conference was sponsored by the CO2 Foundation, the Montana chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) (Region VIII), Providence Healthcare, the National Integrated Drought Information Center (NIDIS), Intermountain Health, the Montana Medical Association Foundation, Amaresco, Yellowstone Naturopathic Clinic, the Montana Asthma Control Program, Seattle Children's Foundation, and the Environmental Protection Agency. This work is certainly a team effort. We are so thankful to everyone who keeps this movement alive.

## Intern

Hannah Mark of Hardin, MT, joined us this past summer as a Yale Climate and Health Intern. She focused on writing and had a Billings Gazette front page article on ag producers, climate change and mental health. She produced Radio Public Service Announcements on health protection in heat and wildfire events, sent to many willing Montana radio stations.

**Climate change's hidden cost: Mental health crisis among Montana's farmers and ranchers**

HANNAH MARK For Lee Montana Newspapers  
Jan 6, 2025



In this photo from Aug. 18, 2023, smoke from the River Road East Fire fills the air in western Montana. After sparking 6 miles east of Plains, the fire ultimately destroyed 64 structures and grew to more than 17,000 acres, making it the second-largest wildfire of the 2023 season.  
GRAY DIEBOLT



Members bike in our annual Ride for Their Lives, 9/14/24.

# THANK YOU!