Uncomposed, edited manuscript published online ahead of print.

This published ahead-of-print manuscript is not the final version of this article, but it may be cited and shared publicly.

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**Title:** Preparing the Next Generation of Health Professionals to Tackle Climate Change

**DOI:** 10.1097/ACM.0000000000004341
Preparing the Next Generation of Health Professionals to Tackle Climate Change

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Acknowledgements: The authors thank the community of medical students working towards climate and health justice and all the physician mentors who have supported them along the way.

Funding/Support: None reported.

Other disclosures: None reported.

Ethical approval: Reported as not applicable.
To the editor: Climate change is the greatest health crisis of the 21st century.¹ The World Health Organization estimates that between 2030 and 2050 climate change will cause 250,000 additional deaths worldwide per year.² Moreover, the impacts of climate change are not equitable, exacerbating many racial health disparities that already exist.³ However, climate change is taught in less than 15% of medical schools worldwide.⁴ Fortunately, there is a growing movement among trainees to address this deficit. Medical students founded the Planetary Health Report Card (https://phreportcard.org/), a metric-based assessment tool designed to inspire medical schools to engage with planetary health. In 2021, 62 medical schools across 4 countries participated in the report card, catalyzing the inclusion of planetary health curricula in many of these schools.

Trainees across the health professions have also paved the way for climate advocacy. Nationally, medical students came together in April 2020 to form Medical Students for a Sustainable Future (https://ms4sf.org/), the first national network of more than 430 medical students across 100 medical schools dedicated to climate action. Several months later, pharmacy students were inspired to start the Sustainable Pharmacy Project (https://sustainablepharmacyproject.org/), the first organization dedicated to training health professionals on the environmental impact of pharmaceuticals. Medical students have also created and shared other materials like a comprehensive curriculum proposal and a podcast, Code Green, which focuses on a different facet of the intersection between climate and health in each episode.

The urgency of the climate crisis has spurred health professions trainees to take action both locally and globally. We ask health professionals at all levels of training to join the movement to ensure a healthy and livable future for our patients and communities.
References


