



Health Care Collaboration is Key to Addressing Climate-driven Medical Issues and to Decarbonizing the Sector, New Report Finds

April 10, 2024 -- Center for Houston's Future released ***Houston's Future: The Intersection of Climate Change and Health Care***, a groundbreaking report that highlights escalating health threats, from heatstroke to mosquito-borne illness, that our region faces due to climate change and includes a series of recommendations to address these challenges. Collaboration within and among health systems is vital.

Find the report here: www.futurehouston.org/climateandhealth

The Center, with its expertise in energy & climate and health & health equity, was motivated to take on this research by a growing recognition of the strong connections between climate change and health, and the pressing need for our region to act.

"By embracing collaborative strategies, acting with urgency and implementing sustainable practices, our region's health care providers can play a pivotal role in creating a healthier, more resilient Houston," said Center President and CEO Brett Perlman. "If we work together, given all the collective wisdom, resources and innovation concentrated in our medical community, we can tackle the challenges that are confronting us."

Our region faces significant risks from climate-driven disasters, such as extreme heat, floods, and hurricanes, which are projected to increase. These events, the report concludes, are likely to worsen health issues like heatstroke, respiratory illnesses, and vector-borne diseases, disproportionately affecting already-vulnerable populations.

At the same time, the U.S. health care sector, responsible for 8.5% of national greenhouse gas emissions, is increasingly recognizing its dual role in both contributing to and addressing climate change. The sector must reduce emissions and integrate climate health into care.

The research is based on a comprehensive review of more than 60 studies, articles, and resources; interviews with more than 20 regional and subject matter experts; and a roundtable discussion.

Local leaders contributed to creating a series of recommendations for Houston's health care system to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, as follows:

- **Collaboration:** Fostering partnerships within and between health care systems and with national organizations to share strategies, access grant funding opportunities, and strengthen advocacy to decarbonize health care.
- **Patient Care:** Developing and implementing protocols to identify and address climate-related health concerns specific to Houston.
- **Leadership:** Engaging health care leaders and physicians as champions for climate action.
- **Education:** Training health care professionals to recognize and address climate health issues and implement strategies to reduce emissions in their facilities.
- **Research Partnership:** Building strong ties between health care providers and researchers to gather data and find solutions for a healthier Houston.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Influencing purchasing and investments toward environmentally friendly options.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Supporting policies that promote low-carbon energy and green spaces.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Regularly measuring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions.

This paper is the latest in a series of health-focused reports from the Center and was made possible with funding from St. Luke's Health, a nonprofit health system with 16 hospitals in Texas. St. Luke's is part of CommonSpirit Health, one of the largest nonprofit health systems in the nation, whose climate action plan establishes industry-leading climate goals and a net-zero commitment.

"As part of CommonSpirit Health, the nation's largest nonprofit healthcare system, St. Luke's Health recognizes that we play a large role in creating and investing in healthier, more equitable communities where we live, work, learn and pray," said Doug Lawson, PhD, president of CommonSpirit Health's South Region. "We are pleased to fund the Center's report that highlights the vital role of collaboration as we work toward sustainable, resilient, climate-smart health care."

About the Center for Houston's Future: The Center for Houston's Future focuses on understanding future global trends and their impact on the Houston region. The Center brings business, government, and community stakeholders together to engage in fact-based strategic planning, collaboration, and action on issues of great importance to the region's success. It engages in research, holds community events and develops leaders.

Its current strategic focus areas include energy, climate and energy transition; health and health equity; and the economic importance of immigration. The Center is an independent affiliate of the Greater Houston Partnership. Its leadership program has graduated more than 1,300 business and civic leaders.

About St. Luke's Health: St. Luke's Health is home to 16 hospitals covering Houston, Brazos Valley, Brazosport, and Lufkin and includes Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center, the research and teaching hospital for Baylor College of Medicine. St. Luke's Health is also home to the Texas Heart [®]Institute (THI), the top-ranked heart center in Houston, and the Dan L Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center, a nationally accredited, NCI-designated cancer center. Its integrated network of care includes more than 380 employed and 1,600 clinically aligned network providers, and more than 21,000 employees, providers, interns, and volunteers delivering high-value, nationally-ranked quality care within a Christian ministry of healing. St. Luke's Health is a part of CommonSpirit Health.

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