

## INTERVIEWS

# CLIMATE HEALTH

## What do you think?

*On assignment, I interviewed a few folks to learn how common folks feel about climate change and public health. I found the responses to be both diverse and unexpected. Probably the most fascinating for me were the responses from a small focus group of tweenages. This infographic captures what I learned.*

### THE CLERICAL MUSICIAN Concerned



The musician earns his money as a legal reporter. Feels for the many people on the planet that are suffering. In his 50's, he has observed the seasons are now different attributes it to climate change. He has also been humbled by extreme weather events. Al Gore is the last time he had really heard any real leaders talk about climate. He is very concerned about food supply/nutrition and billionaires using tech to control weather. News Source: Conversations.

- ✓ Believes health is affected by climate change
- ✓ Concerned for developing countries

### HOME SCHOOLED TWEENAGERS Aware - Concerned - Alarmed

A focus group of about six, 11-14 year olds, and have spent much of their schooling in nature with naturalists. They are aware, concerned, and shared significant frustration with adults who are giving them little education as to how to prepare for their future and their children's future when it comes to climate change.

- ✓ Strong desire to be prepared



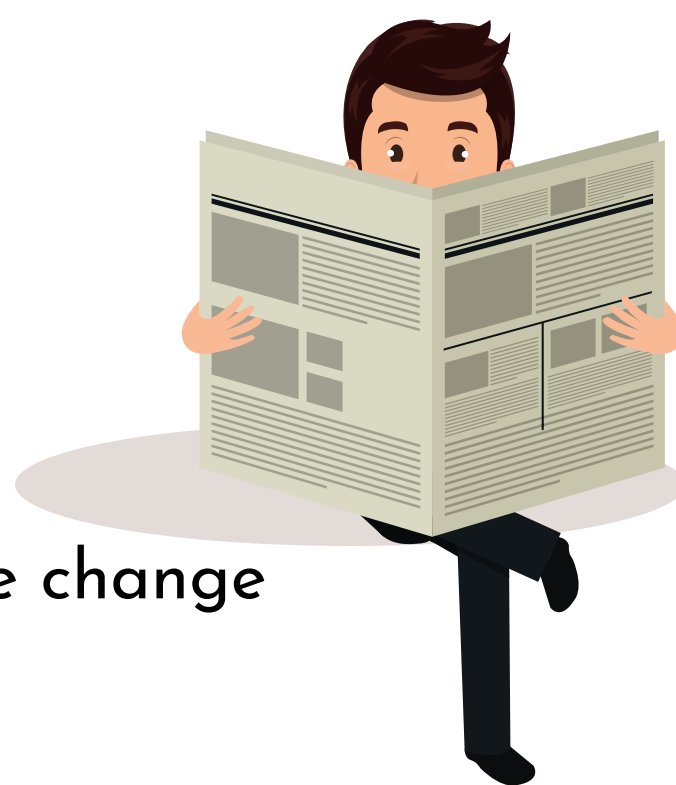
### THE STUDIO ARTIST Skeptically Aware

The artist has lived in 4 different latin american countries and attended some college. When she moved to the US in 2016, that was the first time she ever heard about climate change. The artist doesn't believe the hype and generally has too many other present day things to think about like taking care of her Mom, to be concerned about things that may happen in the future. News Source: Youtube

- ✓ Cares about the environment
- ✓ Upcycles materials into art
- ✗ Not convinced that climate change is an issue.



### THE CEO SOCIAL SCIENTIST Alarmed



The CEO has a masters degree in a social science and believes that modern day politics/conflicts/wars are so divisive because of climate change and its associated issues. Though he doesn't usually discuss climate change with others, he has a deep understanding that many people live in stress, anxiety, disease due to the affects of climate change. The CEO reads many news sources daily, and believes the rich/politicos are dumbing down climate change down for their own advantage. News Sources: Many

- ✓ Must act now to do whatever we can.
- ✓ Is willing to take a role as a leader

### THE GREEN THUMB Skeptical

The Green Thumb is a non conformist, independent, live off the grid enthusiast. She grows her own food, follows a mostly vegan diet, homeschools her children and drives an electric car. She is very very concerned about the planet, particularly the pollution and chemicals in food, soil, air, everywhere. She believes the climate is always changing, and isn't convinced it is caused by humans.

- ✓ Cares deeply about environment & public health
- ✗ Isn't convinced climate change is a human thing





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Here's what I learned...



### Participant Overview

The participants I interviewed represented different socio-economic groups, ranging from being eligible for government subsidies, to upper middle class. The participants were also between the ages of 12 to 50, and each represented a different ethnic group. The participants view of climate change ranged from skeptical to alarmed. I found it difficult to get the participants who were skeptical about climate change to share any relationships with climate health. The first two people I interviewed, generally didn't believe or weren't convinced climate change was a thing or was human caused (anthropogenic), as such, the interview component about climate health was difficult to continue, as such, I interviewed more participants than required, to feel more complete. I was also quite surprised to learn that only one of the participants got their daily news from reputable news sources.



### SIMILARITIES ✓

In comparing the participant responses, I was pleased to find that all of the participants without exception were deeply concerned about the environment. They all could share ways that humans and our industrial lifestyles were creating huge problems for humanity, wild life, the food chain, and the atmosphere. In fact, all of the participants agreed to the health ramifications of our polluted planet. Additionally, they all agreed that when it came to the environment that government was doing very little to intervene, and had a general disdain for lack of leadership in this regard. The two participants that were skeptical also shared in that they believed "climate change" to be a fear campaign. And finally probably the most alarming similarity is that no one I interviewed had regular conversations about climate change, much less climate health, and the very few people they did have conversations with, were only close and personal people that they trusted or knew they shared similar views.

### DIFFERENCES ✕

In contrast, the participants all had different perceptions on climate change and thus different views on climate health. Two participants were very skeptical that climate change was something that was being exacerbated by humans, and even shared individually in some conspiracy theories about the use of "climate change" to instill fear, and control people. Those participants had a hard time answering questions about climate health because that terminology didn't resonate with them. They could speak to health related concerns as to the environment but not climate change or climate health. In contrast, the participants who were concerned and alarmed, were able to directly correlate climate change and its direct impact on climate health, public health, and within the global ecosystem, and were especially concerned for vulnerable populations and gave examples of indigenous peoples, and those in developing countries.





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## Implications for Communication



Key takeaways from these interviews, were valuable for me in the sense that I gleaned a new perspective on my own perceptions on how people view climate change and climate health. Because I have had some training in interviewing, I was very aware of my own positionality and was careful to ask the questions in a non-leading way, and simply listen. Because I simply listened with no interjections, I felt that all of the participants continued to feel safe and not judged throughout the process. In listening, I learned a great deal more than I would have thought. As such if the definition of communication is sending and receiving information, then listening to receive valuable foundational information is key to moving any discussion of climate change or climate health forward. In fact, if these were discussions and not interviews, I felt there were some pathways to open dialog about further discussing climate change and the relationship to climate health, especially for folks who are skeptical. Below is a list of ways we may be able to achieve better communication about climate health, from my own experiences from these interviews and from the book *Climate Change & Public Health* (Levy & Patz) and numerous publications around climate change.



## Communication Strategies

- Know your audience, and don't assume anything about anyone;
- Don't assume people understand jargon, or even what climate change means, and what climate health means (Levy & Patz, 2024);
- Try to get a sense of if people believe climate change is anthropogenic (human caused), and probably never use that word ever, unless you are speaking to climate scientists;
- Understand that every person is a unique individual and need to engage in dialog about climate change/health individually;
- There is a huge opportunity to harness the concerns people have for the environment and help them bridge the gap to climate health, whether they believe it is being exacerbated by humans or not;
- There is also an opportunity to create dialog about climate health, without conflicting debates about how and who it was caused by;
- Encourage dialog, everywhere, as I found no one I interviewed really spent much time at all talking about climate change/health.

Levy, B., & Patz, J. (2015). *Climate change and public health*. Oxford University Press