

ELIE G. AOUN, MD

GENERAL, ADDICTION AND FORENSIC PSYCHIATRY

ELIEGAOUNMD.COM
90 BROAD ST. SUITE 310
NEW YORK, NY, 10004

PHONE: (347) 766 – 1941
FAX: (347) 767 – 2113
EMAIL: ELIE@ELIEGAOUNMD.CO

Position on the Impact of the Changing Climate on Psychiatry

My name is Elie Aoun, and I am a candidate for the ECP trustee at large position. I am a general psychiatrist, an addiction psychiatrist and a forensic psychiatrist on faculty at Columbia University, on staff at the New York State OMH and in private practice in New York and in California. I am clinician, a researcher, a teacher and a proud dog dad.

As an early career psychiatrist, and someone who hopefully still has a long career ahead of him, I am acutely aware of, and especially concerned by the impact of climate change on our society and our planet. I will not attempt to separate the way climate change affects our personal lives in general, from the way it affects mental health in particular as I believe that these two dimensions are not separate.

Climate change and the threat of natural disasters and social changes resulting from having to adapt to the changing climate and geography cause numerous psychological problems. The communal sense grief and disillusionment resulting from this existential threat is associated with depression, anxiety, hopelessness, and states of sociocultural dissociation. In response to the perceived threat of climate change, persons respond with pathological responses to stress, or regress to primitive defenses including denial and suppression.

The climate does not discriminate between communities. Unfortunately, the impact of climate change does however. Minority and underrepresented groups and medically vulnerable populations are particularly vulnerable to its consequences and as such, climate change is considered an important social determinant of health, on its own, or as a result of its societal consequences including population migration, homelessness, limited access to clean water or the spread of infections. These factors that are not consequences of one's health profile, but rather, represent a set of circumstances that contribute to health differentials in our communities. Climate change as a social determinant of health amplifies the health consequences of mental illness among our patients.

Climate change has caused in natural disasters that have increased in frequency and severity over the past five decades and are projected to worsen. Floods, heatwaves, wildfires and storm events are associated with displacement, homelessness, poverty and numerous other problems. The data clearly identifies increased likelihood of conflicts, aggression, depression, anxiety, relationship difficulties and substance use as a result of climate-related natural disasters. Studies of communities devastated by natural disasters showed increased rates of psychiatric pathology, psychiatric hospitalizations and suicides.

It is my view that climate change is a significant social determinant of health in psychiatry, and not treating it as such would be a travesty. The traditional view that the APA must stick to strict mental health issues without taking strong positions against natural, cultural, social or political issues is unacceptable. The APA must prioritize the psychiatric aspects of climate change, amplify the message to educate our colleagues and utilize

its full advocacy and lobbying weight to advocate against climate change and highlight its psychiatric relevancy.

If elected ECP Trustee-at-Large, I will absolutely continue prioritizing climate change as a major factor affecting psychiatry. Please visit my campaign website (ElieForAPA.com) to learn more about my priorities. As I have said numerous times, MY VOICE WILL BE LOUD ON THE BOARD, and I will use my voice to make sure that any issue the APA is considering is assessed from the perspective of whether it advances or hinders the climate change protection priorities.

I will seek to elevate the voice of like-minded members who recognize the psychiatric importance of climate change on the board and will maintain my commitment to serving the cause. I will ensure I will make sure the APA does not remain silent on climate changes and affected communities.

If elected, I will seek to promote the need to develop and disseminate educational resources on the impact of climate change on mental health, collaborate with ACGME and its residency review committee to incorporate climate change in our training curricula. I will ensure the APA annual meetings and scientific priorities are inclusive of climate change priorities. I will also continue to advocate for more research examining the long-term psychiatric consequences of climate change.

I hope I can win your vote. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out
Thank you

Elie G. Aoun, M.D.



Assistant Professor of Psychiatry

Columbia University Division of Law, Ethics and Psychiatry