



This product is meant to accompany "*The Climate Crisis and Mental Health: What Will You Do?*" webinar, presented by Dr. David Pollack held on January 11, 2022
You can watch the webinar on-demand [here](#).

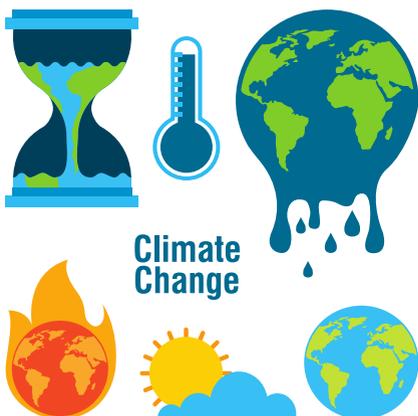
The Climate Crisis and Mental Health: What Will You Do?

Overview of Climate Change's Link to Mental Health

- The climate crisis is a major social determinant of physical health and mental health.
- Psychiatric conditions and other mental health issues often emerge from and are affected by the climate crisis.
- Many communities are at risk of experiencing poor health outcomes as a result of climate change.
- Building community resilience is a key component in the public mental health effort to address the health risks associated with the climate crisis.
- In his webinar, **Dr. David Pollack** discusses ways mental health professionals can speak out about these threats, advocate for rational policies to address health threats caused by the climate crisis, and facilitate recovery from the immediate and longer-term climate crisis-related disasters.



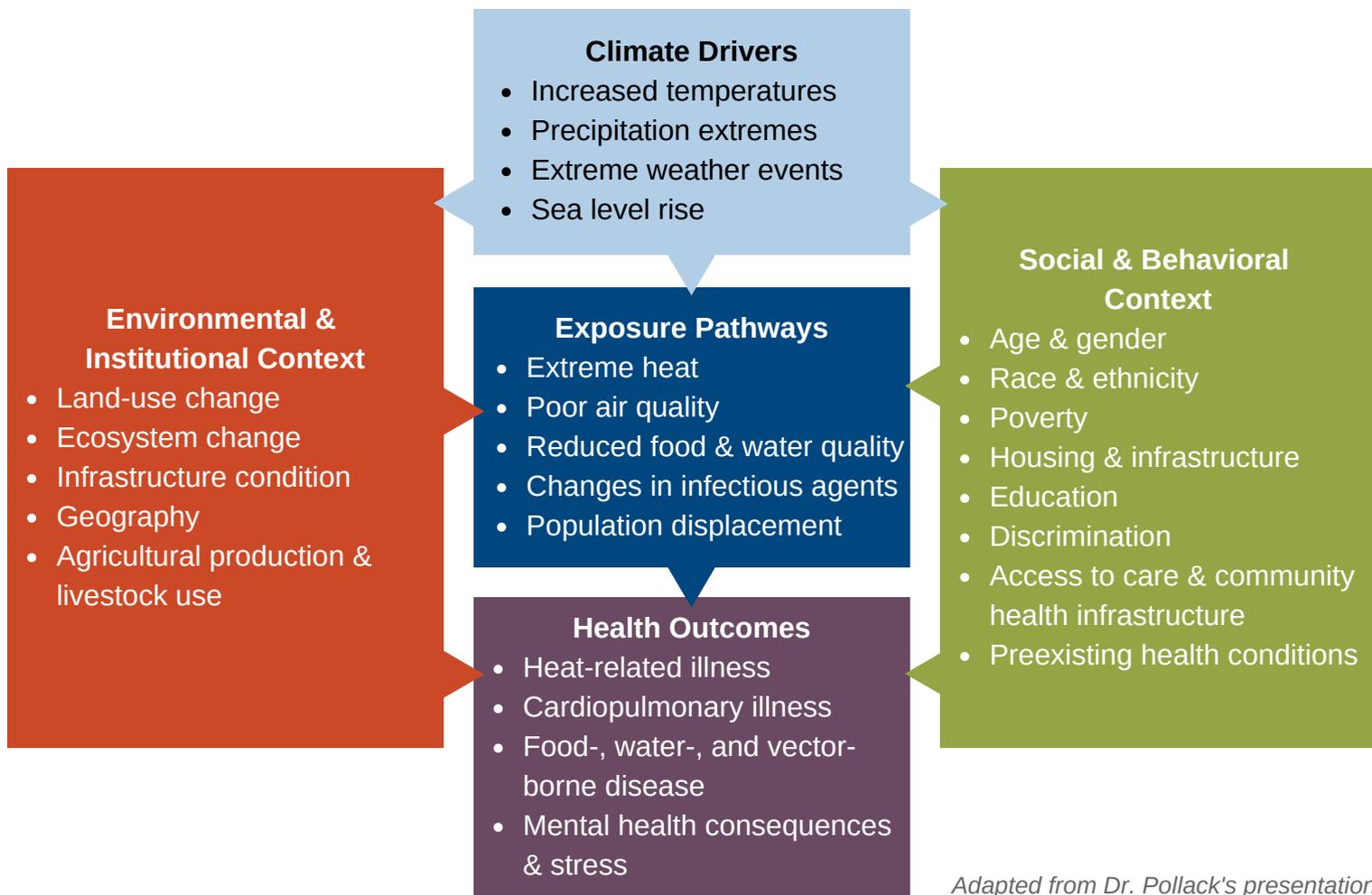
What is Climate Change?



- Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns.¹ Some shifts are attributable to natural causes, although human activity is the **main driver**.
- Major contributors: fossil fuel use and large scale animal agriculture
- The past 40 years have shown a significant increase in the severity of the climate crisis and associated health impacts.
- Climate change threatens the health of the planet as well as its inhabitants.

Climate Drivers of Health Impacts

- Health threats attributable to climate change aggravate existing medical conditions and create new health problems
- Health impacts of the climate crisis range from mild and transient to severe, chronic, and life-threatening
- Mental, physical, and community health problems are linked and the individual, social, and physical issues that mediate these can increase or decrease the amount of vulnerability or resilience that individuals and communities may have.



Vulnerable Groups

Multiple community groups are particularly vulnerable to the health impacts driven by the climate crisis, including:

- Children
- Older adults
- Communities of color
- Indigenous peoples
- Pregnant women
- Immigrant groups
- People with disabilities
- Low-income communities
- People with pre-existing or chronic health conditions
- Some occupational groups (e.g., agricultural workers)

Mental Health Impact of Climate Change

Extreme, acute, and prolonged climate events can create and facilitate numerous mental health impacts.

- Acute/chronic traumatic stress and somatic neuropsychiatric impacts contribute to a wide range of psychiatric conditions associated with the climate crisis:
 - Direct with immediate effect (e.g., heat waves)
 - Indirect in the short term (e.g., floods, tornadoes, hurricanes)
 - Indirect in the long term (e.g., prolonged drought, deforestation, mass migration)
- Although individual prevention and treatment is important, **system change** is the greatest need!

Direct Effects

Heat-related impact:

- Increased risk of aggression / violence, suicide, cerebrovascular illness, dehydration, hyperthermia, death in people with chronic illness, particularly those with chronic psychiatric illness
- Exacerbated tendencies to be less mindful about exposure risks
- Medications can reduce the body's internal thermoregulatory function



Exposure to Neurotoxicants:

- Developmental disabilities in infants and children
- Cognitive impairment in adults

Anxiety, Mood, and Trauma Syndromes:

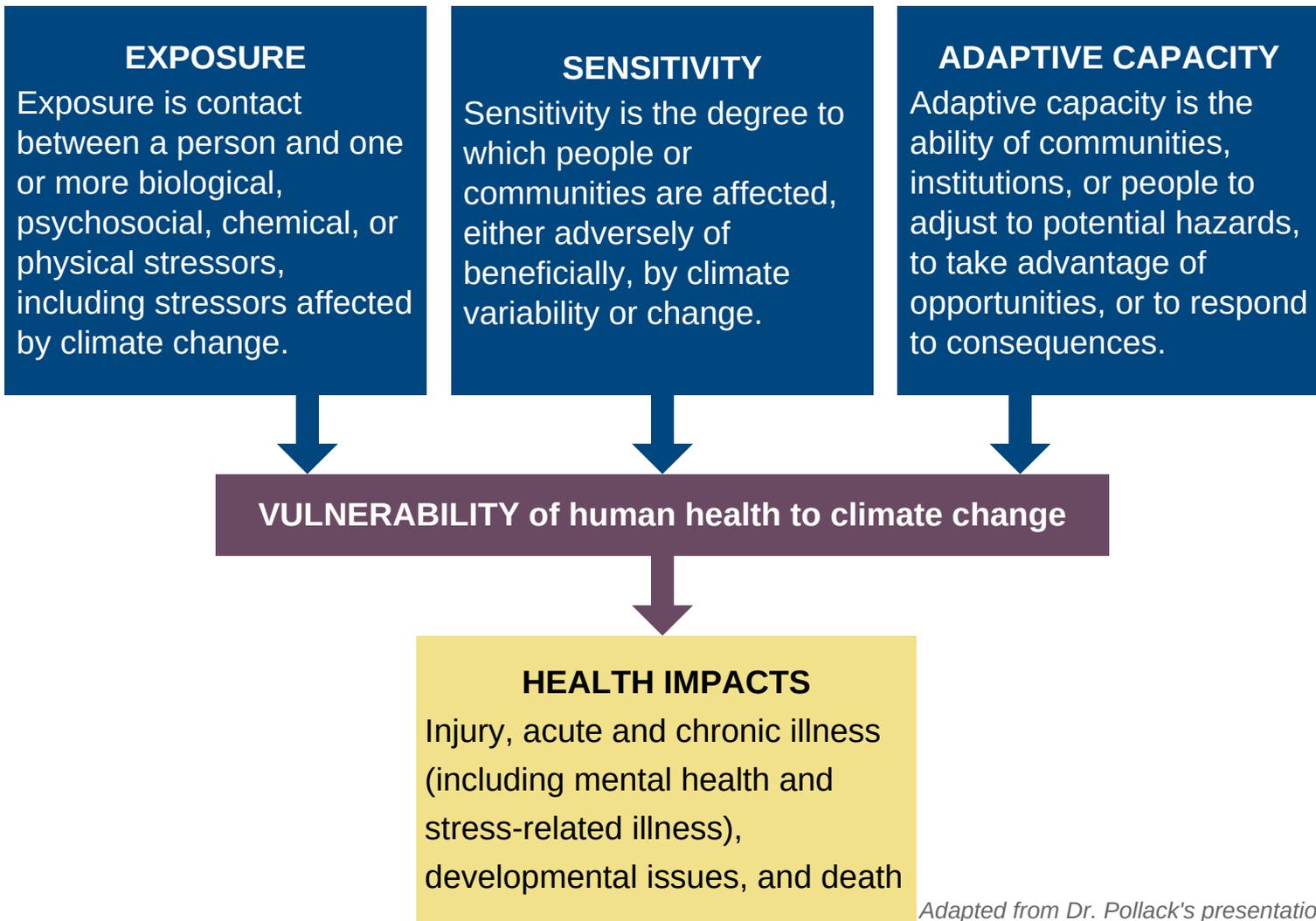
- Eco-anxiety is much more prevalent with numerous manifestations
- Solastalgia, ecological grief, pre-traumatic stress disorder, depression
 - Solastalgia describes symptoms people get when their environments change too rapidly or extremely
- Cognitive impairment in adults

Other Impacts:

- Increased infectious disease outbreaks can contribute to cognitive impairment and movement disorders
- Climate-sensitive water-related illnesses can lead to neurological impacts
- Soil contaminants and increased carbon dioxide can decrease the nutritive value of food crops and contribute to various illnesses, some with an impact on cognitive function
- Best treatment: prevention via elimination of pollutants, especially fossil fuels

Social Determinants of Vulnerability

The degree of exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity that individuals and communities exhibit will lead to their degree of vulnerability or resilience. This vulnerability or resilience will mediate the degree of health impacts individuals and communities experience.



A combination of factors lead to poor health outcomes. A number of particularly important social issues, including structural racism, environmental injustice, and climate change, are likely to lead to a number of adverse health effects.

- Factors like location, age, gender, socioeconomic status, disability can affect vulnerability to physical and mental health effects of climate change.
- Disadvantaged and vulnerable populations experience impacts "first and worst"

Any efforts toward equity contribute to environmental justice, including:

- Human and civil rights
- Housing equity
- Food security
- Transportation accessibility
- Law enforcement accountability
- Healthcare access

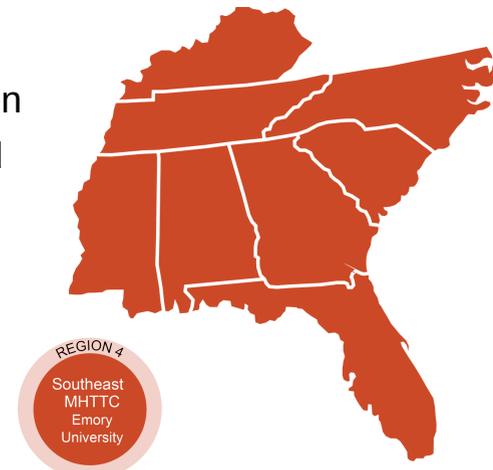
Climate Change in the Southeast

The Southeast has witnessed increased temperatures caused by climate change. Since 1970, annual temperatures in the Southeast have increased by 2°F. By the end of the century, temperatures are expected to increase by 4°F to 8°F.²⁻⁵

Due to climate change and its resulting changes in the environment, cities across the Southeast are at risk of experiencing significant strain on economic, social, health, and other systems.

Severe Weather

The Southeast has seen heavy downpours with increasing intensity, frequency, duration, and strength since the 1980s. In addition to heavy downpours, the Southeast has experienced periods of extreme drying, which can increase the risk of wildfires and significantly impact populations across all eight states. More frequent and intense tornadoes have also been recorded throughout the Southeast. All of these events have significant economic and health impacts.²⁻⁵



Increasing temperatures, sea levels, and other climate change-related shifts threaten Southeast populations, resources, property, and infrastructure. Some populations in the Southeast, particularly those in coastal regions, are threatened by rising sea levels, increasingly intense and frequent hurricanes, storms, and other events attributable to climate change.²⁻⁴

Vulnerable Communities & Regions

- Rural communities and agricultural workers face the risk of climate change affecting their economic stability due to increasing temperatures.
- Coastal regions may be disproportionately affected by social and economic consequences of climate change.
- Existing economic gaps and inequalities may be exacerbated as vulnerable populations are likely to experience the impact of climate change "first and worst."



In addition to the mental health impact of climate change already discussed, people with preexisting health conditions (e.g., asthma) are at risk of experiencing poor health outcomes.

To prevent placing stress on already overburdened health systems, action is urgently needed at the individual, community, and policy levels.

Addressing Climate Change and Climate Change Impacts



Collective and corrective actions at individual and community levels are needed to mitigate, reverse, and prevent future impacts of the climate crisis.

- Immediate and ongoing planning and implementation efforts are needed to combat acute and chronic impacts of climate change
- These efforts depend upon broad participation of health, public health, and mental health professionals

To **address** climate change and its health impacts, health actions for climate include:

- Engage health sector voice in climate action
- Incorporate climate solutions into all health and public health systems
- Build resilient communities in the face of climate change
- Finance climate action and invest in climate and health

Transformational Resilience

The **goal** of transformational resilience is to make adaptive changes to reverse the environmental impacts of the climate crisis.

Essential and high priority responses to the climate crisis include:

- Rapid reductions in carbon emissions
- Preparing human-built infrastructures and natural resources to withstand and adapt to climate impacts



It is also necessary to proactively build the capacity of individuals, families, organizations, and entire communities to cope with climate adversities without harming themselves, other people, or the natural environment. These improvements can also be catalysts to increase social, psychological, and ecologic well-being.

Transformational resilience aims to **empower** all adults and youth with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- Think and act in healthy ways, even in ongoing unhealthy conditions
- Remain actively involved in constructive, pro-social and climate solution activities





References

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2. American Public Health Association (n.d.). *Climate changes health: Vulnerable populations.* <https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/climate-change/vulnerable-populations#:~:text=Other%20groups%20that%20are%20particularly,weather%2C%20and%20people%20with%20pre%2D>
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