

EMPLOYER TIP SHEET

Protecting Employee Mental Health Amid Climate Challenges

SUMMER 2024



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON
**Climate and
Workforce Health**

Our changing climate is not only affecting our physical health; it's also impacting our mental health. The majority of Americans — an estimated 200 million — experience stress, anxiety, or depression as a result of climate-related events, such as extreme heat, wildfires, floods, storms, rising sea levels, and drought.

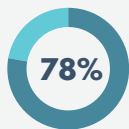
Employers have an important role to play in addressing the mental health impacts of climate change and improving the resilience and well-being of their workforce.

Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change

Having strong emotions — like anger, despair, fear, and more — is a normal response to climate change. Climate-related events can cause or intensify mental health challenges, including:

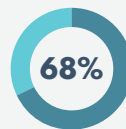
- Anxiety
- Aggressive behavior
- Depression
- Feelings of helplessness, fear, and grief
- General psychological exhaustion
- Increased risk of suicide
- Mood disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Recurrence of bipolar disorder symptoms
- Strained social relationships
- Stress-related psychiatric disorders

Sources: [World Health Organization](#), [National Library of Medicine - National Institutes of Health](#)



78% of people report fear about climate change, with 41% feeling “very” or “extremely” fearful

[Global Future \(2021\)](#)



68% of Gen Z Americans say that climate change negatively affects their mental health, with more youth of color (71%) citing a mental health impact

[BlueSky \(2023\)](#)



Climate & Mental Health: The Toll on Business

Climate-induced mental health conditions can adversely affect workplace behaviors, resulting in productivity loss, absenteeism, presenteeism, job turnover, heightened hostility, and difficulty making work-related decisions. Globally, the additional costs of climate-related mental health conditions are projected to reach nearly \$47 billion annually by 2030.



For each employee experiencing mental distress, employers lose \$15,000 per year due to lost productivity, health care costs, and turnover.



Employees with depression miss up to 25 days more per year than other workers.



Employees with depression experience impaired performance for one to two hours of every eight-hour shift.

However, investing in mental health support for workers significantly benefits employers.



62% of workers say they would stay at a job with good mental health benefits.



Employers see a return of \$4 for every \$1 invested in employee mental health support and treatment.

DELVING DEEPER: ECO-ANXIETY AND ECO-GRIEF

Eco-anxiety and eco-grief are distinct emotional responses to climate change. Severe weather events, poor air quality, and news and social media coverage of climate issues can intensify these feelings.

Eco-Anxiety

More than two-thirds of U.S. adults experience eco-anxiety (also called climate anxiety), which is driven by concerns about the impact climate change has on people, the planet, and future generations. It can cause intrusive thoughts, feelings of distress, and physical symptoms such as a racing heart and shortness of breath. Some 43% of workers experience eco-anxiety “often” or “almost always,” resulting in feelings of powerlessness, work demotivation, and lost focus.

Eco-Grief

Eco-grief, also called climate grief, arises from witnessing or anticipating irreversible changes in the environment. This can lead to feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and mourning as people come to terms with the loss of species, ecosystems, and meaningful landscapes.



Tips for Supporting Employee Mental Health

“Employers play a pivotal role in supporting their employees’ mental health from the impacts of climate change,” said Sarah Newman, Founder and Executive Director of the [Climate Mental Health Network](#). “By providing access to climate-mental health resources and creating a supportive work environment, they can help workers develop emotional resilience and protect their well-being in the face of severe climate events.”

Here are some steps you can take to protect your workforce from the mental health impacts of climate change:

PROVIDE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Ensure employees have affordable access to mental health services. Offer insurance plans that include coverage for mental health care, and provide resources for finding mental health providers. Communicate these benefits at on-boarding and year-round so employees know how to access care.

SUPPORT EMPLOYEES IN CRISIS

Climate events can lead to loss of life, food insecurity, housing loss, damage to community infrastructure such as schools and libraries, child care challenges, and more stressors that can harm physical and mental health. Offer [additional support](#) to employees facing these difficulties, including flexible time off, remote work options, paid leave, temporary financial assistance, material support, and counseling services.

ENCOURAGE SOCIAL CONNECTION

Recognize that climate-related emotions are common, and offer optional spaces — such as virtual platforms or employee resource groups — for workers to connect and share their experiences and coping strategies.

ENCOURAGE NATURE CONNECTION

Promote opportunities for employees to connect with nature, such as organizing company outings to parks and providing plants and nature imagery for the office. This can help reduce stress and enhance overall well-being.

PROMOTE ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

If possible in your area, encourage employees to use public transportation, bike, walk, or carpool to work. These options reduce emissions and offer [various health benefits](#), including decreased stress. Offer incentives such as transit passes or bike maintenance subsidies.



PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Join forces with local climate response groups to create volunteer opportunities for employees. This can include organizing or participating in community clean-up events, disaster response efforts, or local climate resilience and advocacy initiatives. Collective climate action has been shown to alleviate climate-related mental health impacts.

IMPLEMENT EXTREME HEAT AND AIR QUALITY PLANS

Create policies and standards to safeguard workers from extreme heat and poor air quality; these climate conditions pose serious risks to physical and mental health, increasing the risk of aggressive behavior, suicide, depression, and anxiety.

PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

Mitigate employee anxiety by preparing your workplace for climate-related emergencies and training managers and employees on emergency response procedures. Set up a communication plan for timely updates and support. Equip your workplace with essential supplies, such as water and first aid kits, and include provisions for employees with disabilities. Encourage employees to create emergency “go bags” for their homes.

SHARE YOUR CLIMATE AND HEALTH EFFORTS

Be transparent about your organization’s actions to protect employees and reduce environmental impacts. Regularly update employees on plans to address extreme climate conditions. Communicating your company’s climate protection and sustainability efforts can help alleviate eco-anxiety.



PRESENTING SPONSOR



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM



ClimateHealthCommission.org

Protecting Your Mental Health Amid Climate Challenges

SUMMER 2024

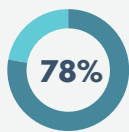
Our changing climate is not only affecting our physical health; it's also impacting our mental health. If you're like most Americans, you may experience stress, anxiety, or depression as a result of extreme heat, wildfires, floods, storms, drought, and other climate-related events. This guide provides tips to help you protect your mental health.

Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change

Having strong emotions — like anger, despair, fear, and more — is a normal response to climate change. Climate-related events can cause or intensify mental health challenges, including:

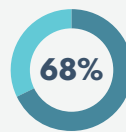
- Anxiety
- Aggressive behavior
- Depression
- Feelings of helplessness, fear, and grief
- General psychological exhaustion
- Increased risk of suicide
- Mood disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Recurrence of bipolar disorder symptoms
- Strained social relationships
- Stress-related psychiatric disorders

Sources: [World Health Organization](#), [National Library of Medicine - National Institutes of Health](#)



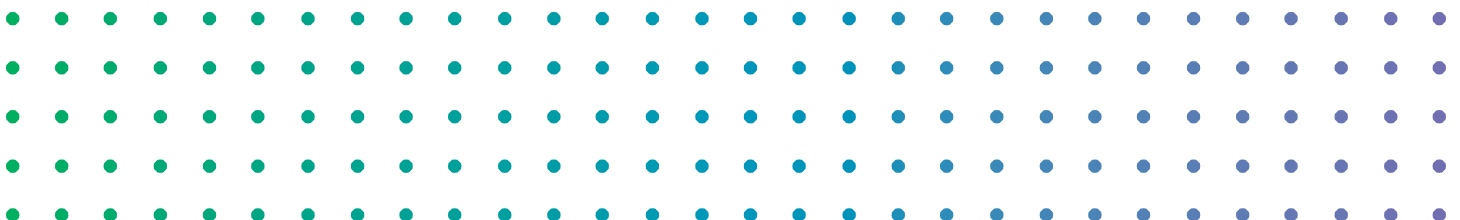
78% of people report fear about climate change, with 41% feeling “very” or “extremely” fearful

[Global Future \(2021\)](#)



68% of Gen Z Americans say that climate change negatively affects their mental health, with more youth of color (71%) citing a mental health impact

[BlueSky \(2023\)](#)



Tips for Supporting Your Mental Health

Here are some practical steps to help manage climate-related anxiety and support your mental health and well-being. You can find more tips and resources at the [Climate Mental Health Network](#).

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Join a [support group](#) or employee resource group focused on climate or [mental health](#) to connect with others who share your concerns, exchange experiences, and explore coping strategies together. If you are a parent, [talk to your kids](#) about climate change.

BE MINDFUL ABOUT MEDIA

Overconsumption of negative news can increase anxiety and stress. [Cut back](#) on stressful media by limiting your time spent browsing your news feed and social media accounts. Instead, focus on [hobbies you enjoy](#).

CONSIDER YOUR COMMUTE

Use public transportation, walk, or bike to work. These options reduce emissions and offer [various health benefits](#), including decreased stress.

GET INVOLVED

Learn about [environmental justice](#) and consider [advocating](#) for climate protections, such as [heat](#) and [air quality standards](#), [decarbonization](#), [tree equity](#), [green spaces](#), and [renewable energy](#). Using your unique [skills and interests](#) to take action in your community can help combat feelings of helplessness or powerlessness.



DELVING DEEPER: ECO-ANXIETY AND ECO-GRIEF

Eco-anxiety and eco-grief are common emotional responses to climate change. Severe weather events, poor air quality, and news and social media coverage of climate issues can intensify these feelings.

Eco-Anxiety

More than [two-thirds](#) of U.S. adults experience eco-anxiety (also called climate anxiety), a fear of climate change's impact on people, the planet, and future generations. It [can cause](#) intrusive thoughts, feelings of distress, and physical symptoms such as a racing heart and shortness of breath, as well as behavioral issues that can harm relationships and work function.

Eco-Grief

[Eco-grief](#), also called climate grief, arises from witnessing or anticipating irreversible changes in the environment. This can lead to feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and mourning as people come to terms with the loss of species, ecosystems, and meaningful landscapes.

PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

Plan for climate events by creating an emergency “go bag,” ensuring you have food, water, flashlights, a first aid kit, electronic chargers, hygiene supplies, and stress-reducing items like books and games. Be sure to obtain medication refills in advance. Make a call list of people to check in on.

ENJOY NATURE

Spending time in nature can help reduce stress and anxiety related to climate change. Outdoor activities can improve your mood and your brain function.

BE CREATIVE

Express yourself through journaling, music, writing, or art therapy. Creative activities reduce stress, promote mindfulness, and provide a way to process your emotions, supporting your mental well-being.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL CARE

If you’re experiencing intense symptoms or feel you need personalized support, consider talking to a mental health professional who can provide guidance and treatment. If you’re in a mental health crisis, don’t hesitate — call 911 or 988 immediately.



PRESENTING SPONSOR



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM



ClimateHealthCommission.org



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON Climate and Workforce Health

PRESENTING SPONSOR



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM



The National Commission on Climate and Workforce Health was created by the Health Action Alliance in partnership with Mercer and with strategic input from the CDC Foundation. Additional support for the initiative is being provided by Elevance Health and The Hartford.

EDITORIAL NOTE: This tip sheet was developed by the Health Action Alliance and reviewed by members of the National Commission on Climate and Workforce Health; however, it is not endorsed by every Commission member or their affiliated organizations. The Health Action Alliance is solely responsible for the content of this tip sheet and maintains full editorial control of its resources. For more information about how we work with corporate sponsors, please refer to our [Corporate Sponsorship Policy](#).

DISCLAIMER: This report provides an overview of workplace health issues and is not intended to be nor should be construed as legal, business, medical, scientific or any other advice for any particular situation. The content included herein is provided for informational purposes only and may not reflect the most current developments as the subject matter is extremely fluid. This report contains links to third-party websites. Such links are only for the convenience of the reader, user or browser; the Health Action Alliance does not recommend or endorse the contents of the third-party sites.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: This guide was informed by research and resources published by the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Public Health Association (APHA), the Annals of Global Health, Deutsches Ärzteblatt International, ecoAmerica, The Commonwealth Fund, The Conference Board, Harvard Health Publishing, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, the Journal of The Society of Occupational Medicine, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), One Earth, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the University of Colorado Boulder, the World Health Organization (WHO), and Yale Sustainability.

Special thanks to members of the National Commission on Climate and Workforce Health, the American Public Health Association (APHA), Mercer, The Hartford, Elevance Health, the de Beaumont Foundation, and the Climate Mental Health Network for providing expert insights and feedback on this resource.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

 ClimateHealthCommission.org

 Climate@HealthAction.org