

Climate Change and Mental Health Task Force



As Chancellor Hawgood noted at the 2018 Global Action Climate Summit, “It’s blindingly clear that climate change is the greatest health threat to future generations.” The mental health-specific impacts stemming from changes to our environment are no less daunting.

Because it is vital to do everything we can on this critical issue, the UCSF Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences has created a Climate Change and Mental Health Task Force. This working group is charged with fostering awareness of the climate crisis and its wider ecological and psychosocial reverberations, not only within our department, but also

across campus and our community partners. The task force also focuses on finding methods to incorporate our efforts on this front into all of our missions: research, education, patient care, and public service.

Climate change is already having profound and under-researched effects on mental health and delivery of care. These consequences intersect with crises in homelessness, immigration, and other forms of displacement. We know that climate-related distress is occurring among our department members, the larger university community, and the patients and populations we serve. It is important to confront and process this distress as we make efforts to prevent and mitigate climate change.

Our department can become a leader on this issue and in the burgeoning field of climate psychiatry through aligned efforts in education and research, service coordination, and low-emission, high-quality operations. To help make that possible, we are working to leverage our connections with the UCSF Office of Sustainability, the UC Office of the President's Carbon Neutrality Initiative, professional and advocacy organizations, and many others.

If you are a department member who is interested in serving on the task force or becoming more involved in this area, please reach out to Adri Jayaratne ^[1].

Recent news and publications

- **Forbes:** For the Elderly, Climate Change Poses More Risks to Wellness ^[2]
- **Academic Psychiatry:** The Time is Now: Climate Change and Mental Health ^[3]
- **Psychiatric News:** Building Resilience to Climate Catastrophe in Children and Adolescents: An Urgent Need ^[4]
- **Ensia:** Opinion: Climate Change is the New Disease of Despair, Psychologists Need to Step Up to Help ^[5]

Sizzling Hot: Practical and Advocacy Implications for Health Care Providers

Please join us on Friday, August 13, 2021 from 12:00-1:00 p.m. for a discussion about the impacts of climate change, heatwaves, and fire season on mental health, and what we can do to mitigate those effects. Speakers will include Robin Cooper, MD, and Tova Fuller, MD, PhD. Moderated by Elissa Epel, PhD, and Adri Jayaratne.

To attend this free event, register online now at psychiatry.ucsf.edu/sizzlinghot ^[6].



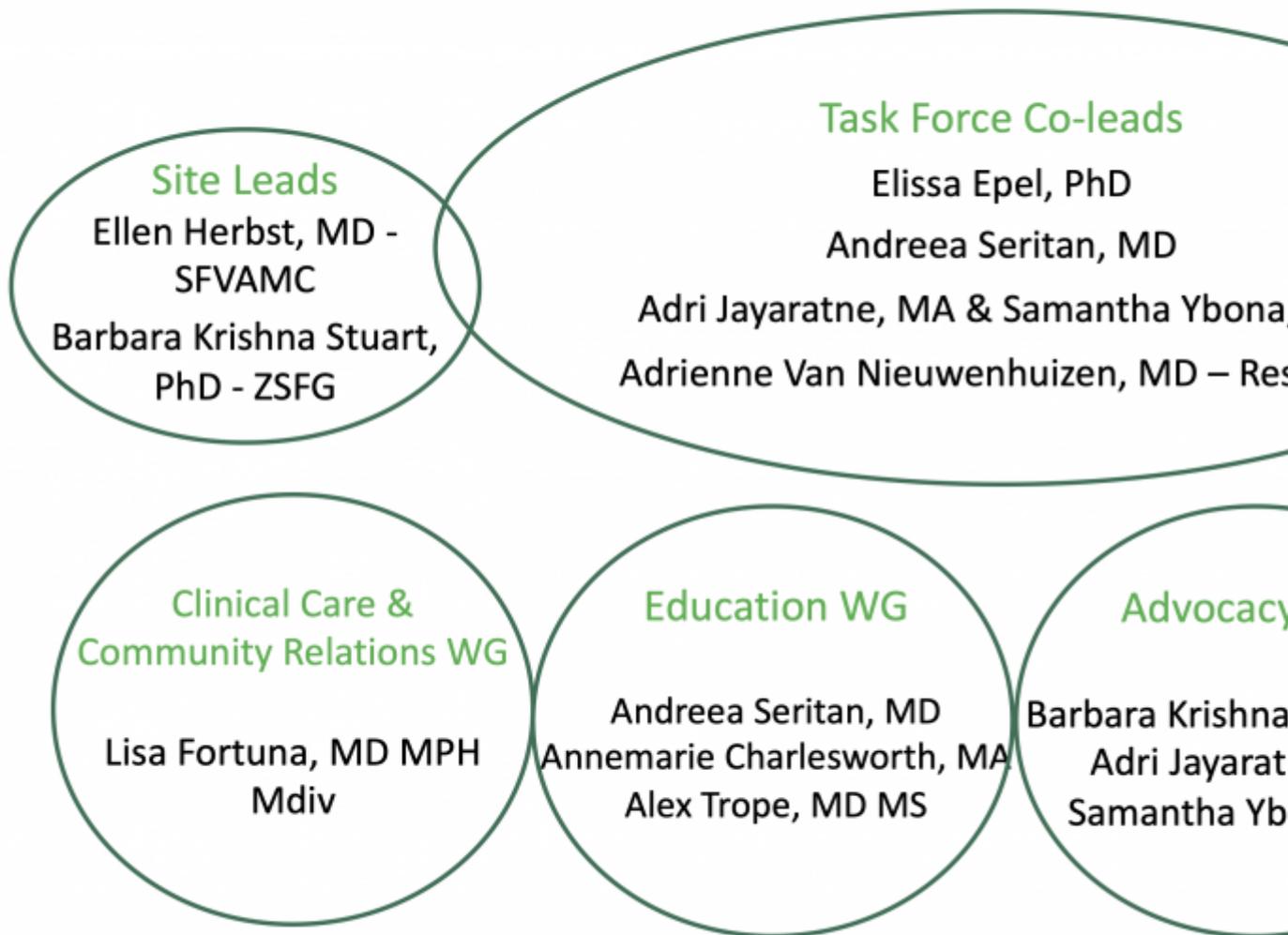
[7]

Task force kick-off event

On Wednesday, October 16, 2019, the task force held a two-hour kick-off event featuring presentations from faculty and students, as well as breakout group sessions on a variety of topics.

[Video of Climate Change and Mental Health Task Force Kick-Off](#)

UCSF DPBS Climate Change and Mental



WG = Work group. Full membership list available at: [https://ucsf.app.bo](https://ucsf.app.box.com/s/...)

[8]

Task force mission statement

To foster awareness of the climate crisis and its wider ecological and psychosocial reverberations, not only within our department, but across campus, the UC system, and our community partners. In the face of mounting crises and resource constraints, we are committed to preserving the benefits of the psychiatric milestones of the 20th century, while applying scientifically and clinically valid climate research and knowledge to transform mental health care to properly respond to the climate crisis of the 21st century. The task force will also focus on finding strategies to incorporate our efforts on this front into all of our missions: research, education, patient care, and public service.

Climate change has profound, yet under-recognized and under-researched effects on mental health and delivery of care. The impact of climate change intersects with and compounds crises in homelessness, immigration, and other forms of population displacement. Most vulnerable populations include children, older adults, people with mobility and cognitive

impairments, homeless individuals, and those with persistent and severe mental illness. We must rise to the challenge and work to find ways to prevent and mitigate climate change and its consequences on the health of our patients and community. As physicians, psychologists, and allied mental health providers, we have a duty to address this unprecedented health emergency.

This task force is intended to serve as a catalyst to embolden each one of the department's faculty, staff, and trainees to take individual and collective action to prevent and mitigate the mental health consequences of climate change. Through the work of this task force, we hope our department can become a local and national leader in the burgeoning field of climate psychiatry.

Additional resources

- *The Lancet Countdown: Tracking Progress on Health and Climate Change* ^[9] - An international, multi-disciplinary research collaboration between academic institutions following on from the 2015 *Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change*, which emphasized that the response to climate change could be "the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century."
- *Nature Climate Change*, Volume 8, Issue 4 ^[10] - A collection of articles on climate change and mental health that highlight important directions for future research.
- *UCSF Synapse* ^[11] - A collection of articles on the connection between climate and mental health by resident physician Alex Trope
- Climate Psychiatry Alliance ^[12] - A 501(c)(3) advocacy group lead by concerned psychiatrists who are "united by the mission of assuring optimal mental health by preventing and mitigating climate change's impact on mental health and maximizing the mental and physical health co-benefits of a sustainable, regenerative, global response."
- Human Health + Climate Change ^[13] - An interdisciplinary student organization at UCSF made up of medical, pharmacy, nursing and dentistry students focused on creating awareness and enacting change around climate-health issues.
- Talk Climate ^[14] - Resources for talking with children about the climate crisis.
- American Psychiatric Association: Climate Change and Mental Health Connections ^[15]
- American Psychological Association: Environment ^[16]
- American Public Health Association: Climate Changes Mental Health ^[17]
- UCSF Office of Sustainability: Climate Changes Health posters ^[18]

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Source URL (modified on 07/21/2021 - 2:25pm): <https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/climatechange>

Links

[1]

mailto:adri.jayaratne@ucsf.edu?subject=Climate%20Change%20and%20Mental%20Health%20Task%20Force

[2] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melinawalling/2021/04/12/for-the-elderly-climate-change-poses-more-risks-to-wellness/?sh=2df614c8c7fc>

[3] https://psych.ucsf.edu/sites/psych.ucsf.edu/files/Seritan-Seritan_ClimateMH_AP2020.pdf

[4] <https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2020.2a25>

[5] <https://ensia.com/voices/climate-change-despair-psychologists-therapy-depression-hope/>

[6] <https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/sizzlinghot>

[7] <https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/hot>

[8] <https://ucsf.app.box.com/folder/88602620857>

[9] <https://www.thelancet.com/climate-and-health>

[10] <https://www.nature.com/nclimate/volumes/8/issues/4>

[11] <https://synapse.ucsf.edu/users/alex-schrobenhauser-clonan>

[12] <https://www.climatepsychiatry.org/>

[13] <https://sustainability.ucsf.edu/getinvolved/hhcc>

[14] <https://talkclimate.org/handouts>

[15] <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/climate-change-and-mental-health-connections>

[16] <https://www.apa.org/topics/environment/index.html>

[17] https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/topics/climate/climate_changes_mental_health.ashx

[18] https://sustainability.ucsf.edu/get_involved_stay_informed/climate_changes_health_posters