

## Health Approaches to Climate Change:

How do health care providers and public health professionals approach climate change differently?



#### Health care providers offer treatment.

When individuals suffer harm as a result of climate change or climate events, they seek medical attention to treat heat stroke from rising temperatures, asthma from increased air pollution, water-borne illness from flooding, Lyme disease from expanding host habitat or injury after a devastating storm and to cope with mental wellness issues after job, family, housing or other loss or injury following an extreme weather event.

# The public health field focuses on prevention, detection and management.

Public health professionals work to understand and educate the public on the health consequences of climate change; help communities prepare for climate events by providing heat wave warnings, air quality index alerts, water safety testing, mosquito control programs, storm warnings and more; and coordinate detection, tracking and management of public health emergencies.





Differences between how healthcare providers address climate change and how public health professionals address climate change, a few examples:



### Health care field

\*Individual focus

*Ex:* Treating a patient for heat stroke due to the extreme temperatures of climate change.

\*Emphasis on disease diagnosis, treatment and care for the individual patient

*Ex: Testing a patient for parasites following a flood/extreme rainfall or severe storm event in their community.* 

\*Medical paradigm places predominant emphasis on medical care or treatment

Ex: A doctor providing antibiotics and/or pain medication for a patient with Lyme disease, which can be contracted later in the season and in a larger geographical area due to the warmer temperatures of climate change.

### **Public health field**

\*Population focus

*Ex:* Promoting heat wave warning systems to help communities prepare for heat waves.

\*Emphasis on disease prevention and health promotion for the whole community

Ex: Monitoring and testing water for contaminants.

*Ex: Assisting communities in implementing climate adaption plans.* 

\*Interventions aimed at the environment, human behavior and lifestyle and medical care

*Ex:* Working with mosquito control program officers to predict insect outbreak hot spots and preparing the public in those areas.

*Ex:* Coordinating with community organizations to promote insect repellent or long-sleeved clothes.

*Ex:* Spreading information or holding information sessions on how to safely use insect repellent and which repellent to use.

\*From: <u>https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/about/public-health-medicine/</u>