Climate Changes Mental Health

When you think about climate change, how do you feel? If you are overwhelmed with fear or feeling depressed or despondent, you are not alone. In 2020, 67% of people in the U.S. surveyed by the American Psychiatric Association said they were somewhat or extremely anxious about climate change. More than one half said they were anxious about the impact of climate change on their mental health (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).

The chronic fear of environmental doom is termed “eco-anxiety” and it reaches beyond environmental and public health spaces (Clayton et al., 2021). In 2022, eco-anxiety and environmental and public health spaces (Clayton et al., 2021). Equipped with information from NEHA and ecoAmerica’s Climate for Health Program, you can make a difference in your organization and community.

Mental Health and Our Changing Climate provides direction for building community resilience to the mental health impacts of climate change and for accelerating climate solutions (Clayton et al., 2021). Some examples include:

1. Expanded response and resiliency plans can play a significant role in mitigating mental health concerns. Environmental health professionals should invite mental health professionals and affected community members into the planning process to incorporate short- and long-term mental health implications of climate change.

2. Increase and maintain social cohesion. Following climate disasters and weather-related events, community leaders, including environmental health professionals, should support one another. Social cohesion and social networks provide community members with much-needed support.

3. Address disparities to advance mental health equity. Environmental injustices have impacted communities for decades and all other resilience-building actions need to be paired with addressing inequities. A good place to start at the community level...
is conducting a vulnerability assessment. The results can then inform preparedness efforts such as prevention of climate disasters, reduction of exposure to disasters, and allocation of resources following a disaster.

You cannot take care of others if you do not take care of yourself. As you bring forth climate solutions and mental health resiliency in your organization and community, remember to also care for yourself. Spend time often with supportive people in your life (Bekkar, 2021). Providing solutions and helping to empower climate change solutions today will help counter distress (Clayton et al., 2021). We are, certainly, in this fight together.

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References

“There are some solutions that require our collective action. One of them is acknowledging that there are important mental health impacts [of climate change] and that we have to take that into consideration as we think about this issue.”
Arthur C. Evans, Jr., PhD, Chief Executive Officer, American Psychological Association (ecoAmerica, 2022, 16:03)