

# Take Charge Of Your Health Today. Be Informed. Be Involved.

## Climate change

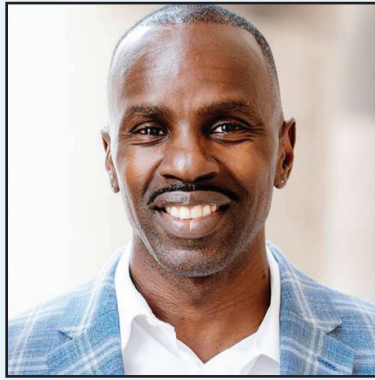
How do you see climate change impacting your community's health?

I see it impacting the quality of life of our children and families in many ways. It impacts our physical health when our children have asthma at higher rates and are exposed to greater heat and anguish living in environments that don't have adequate tree cover. It impacts our mental health when we

have to deal with higher levels of discomfort and air pollution at higher rates as a result of redlining and other systemic racist policies. Further, our children and families are negatively impacted by not having access to beautiful green space where they can relax and play and this creates higher stress levels. Our families deserve to have the basic comforts and quality of life shared by more privileged populations.

What are some changes that the Urban League may be able to lead?

First and foremost, we can hold ourselves accountable and try to be good role models when it comes to protecting natural resources, reduction of consumerism and waste, and reduction



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of energy consumption where and when possible. The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh continues to advocate for policy change that leads to a better

quality of life for African Americans and other marginalized communities in Southwestern PA. Whenever possible, we make sure our voice is at the table when health and policy issues are discussed. We continue to advocate for issues that affect the Black Community. However, we cannot lead every issue impacting Black people. Whenever possible we will continue to collaborate and partner with organizations in the region who are focused on this change.

How do we make climate change a priority for all of us?

We start by saying that climate change is having an impact on our planet Earth and its people. Specifically, we need to acknowledge the dire impacts it is having on children, especially those

in marginalized communities around the globe. Those who are living in flood plains and barren and arid geographic areas are the first to suffer from increasingly volatile weather conditions. We need to advocate and support responsible policy change that protects the health and wellbeing of all people and of our planet. We must single out and support organizations that are doing the work to protect us and that are committed to sustainable practices that safeguard our most vulnerable communities. We need to vote and to hold government officials accountable. We must use our voices to demand better for our local community and for our global community.

*Carlos Carter is President and CEO, Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh*

## Working together to take on the climate crisis

by Dr. Gabriel Cisneros & Dr. Maya Ragavan

Climate change is here and everyone is suffering from the results.

In Pittsburgh, we feel it in hotter-than-average temperatures and more deadly heat waves.

We cope with it as heavy rain and snow, that leads to frequent and severe flooding and landslides. These conditions make it harder to get to work, stores, or school.

We notice it in spring when weekly temperatures may rise from 19 degrees on a Tuesday morning to 75 degrees on a Thursday afternoon.

Black communities suffer more from climate change

In Pittsburgh and throughout the U.S., Black communities are suffering from climate change more than white communities. That's due to systemic racism that determines where Black people live, work, go to school, and have (or don't have) easy and affordable access to health care.

This climate injustice is the result of redlining. Redlining is the 1930s policy that made sure Black communities were located near highways, industrial sights, and landfills. Redlining continues to contribute to a cycle of poverty.

These communities have fewer trees, grassy areas, and parks and more concrete. They're located next to factories, manufacturing and power plants, and mills.

The result is Black neighborhoods that are hotter and more polluted than white neighborhoods.

Black children suffer most of all

While everyone suffers from climate change, Black children are especially in danger.

More than 88% of climate change disease occurs in children younger than 5 years (World Health Organization).

Half the world's children are at an extremely high risk of climate change impact (UNICEF).

What does that look like for Black youth in Pittsburgh? As pediatricians, we see the health effects of climate change on children. As a result, we're dedicated to working with parents, families, and communities to advocate for policy and practice changes that address the climate crisis.

During heat waves, for example, there's an increased risk of death among babies and high school athletes. Both groups can become dehydrated quickly, and often don't show signs of heat stroke until their conditions become dangerous.

Another effect of climate change is asthma. As temperatures rise, the pollen season lasts longer. Air quality gets worse, which makes it harder to breathe and often triggers an asthma attack.

According to the EPA, Black children, regardless of family income, report higher rates of asthma. These children are 2x as likely to be hospitalized



DR. GABRIEL CISNEROS

with asthma and 4x as likely to die from asthma as white children.

As Pittsburgh pediatricians, we're also treating more Lyme disease. Deer ticks, which thrive in warmer temperatures, aren't just found in the woods anymore. They're on the move and causing an increase in serious childhood health problems, such as infections of the brain or joints, and inflammation of the heart.

Another concern is climate-related mental health. The effect of climate change on the emotional health of Black children is stressful. Along with systemic racism in all its forms, they experience direct trauma from extreme weather events and natural disasters — and deal with



DR. MAYA RAGAVAN

anxiety about their future.

What do we want our communities to look like?

Our climate's health and our human health are linked, especially for our children.

Environmentally, we want for them what every parent, grandparent, or caregiver wants: A safe, beautiful neighborhood full of trees, flowers, and green spaces. A place where they can play and dream and create.

How can we make that happen for them? By advocating for climate justice.

Climate justice happens when everyone shares the responsibility of climate change equally, including equal protection from its effects.

How do we do work for climate justice? First, we admit that climate change is an-

other unequal problem Black people face. Climate change joins a long list of inequities, including excessive police force, education, unemployment, healthcare, and transportation. Climate change is related to these inequities. Dismantling each of them will help to dismantle them all.

The big changes that will reduce the effects of climate change must happen on a government scale at the policy level, which can make people who live in underserved neighborhoods feel as if they don't have a stake in the game.

However, they do — we all do — locally at the community level and personally in our outlook and actions.

What can you do as a member of the Black community and as a Black citizen concerned about the state of the environment?

Vote — Your vote is your voice for climate justice, especially as it impacts children.

Public officials at every level of government must be held accountable for their ability to create and maintain policy that fights climate change, improves people's health, and creates clean energy jobs.

Communicate — Contact your Pittsburgh district and Allegheny county representatives and demand they support clean energy.

Visit the City of Pittsburgh website at [www.pittsburghpa.gov](http://www.pittsburghpa.gov). On the home page in the top bar, click on "City Hall" then "City Council."

To find your House and Senate representatives visit [www.legis.state.pa.us](http://www.legis.state.pa.us). In the left-hand column of the homepage, choose "Find My Legislator." There, you can search by typing in your address.

Join — Find a local group that inspires you to create beautiful neighborhood spaces through art (murals, for example) or trees and green spaces.

One local nature organization is Tree Pittsburgh, an environmental non-profit group that restores and protects the urban forest (think street trees) through tree planting and care, education, advocacy, and land conservation. Use your smart phone to visit [www.treepittsburgh.org](http://www.treepittsburgh.org).

Also check out our spotlight on UrbanKind Institute.

Demand — Insist that people in power create plans to reduce carbon emissions for corporations, cities, states, and other institutions and systems. Your voice matters!

*Dr. Cisneros & Dr. Ragavan are co-chairs of the PA AAP Climate and Environmental Health Committee. Dr. Cisneros serves as co-chair of PA AAP Advocacy Committee*

## Cities should be kind places for residents

In 2016, the UrbanKind Institute began magnifying the voices of over-burdened and under-resourced Pittsburgh residents.

The organization, which calls itself a "think-and-do tank," is based on equity and social justice through:

Community engagement and education

Research and policy work  
Equity-based facilitation  
Program development and



DR. JAMIL BEY

evaluation

Led by Dr. Jamil Bey, President & CEO, UrbanKind Institute has created meaningful programs. Here are just three examples:

Black Environment Collective, where leaders of color can respond to Black populations affected by environmental emergencies.

Black Futures led by Black youth who are charged with imagining a bright future through the

lenses of culture, community, art, and politics. Young people matter!

Trust Trees, which focuses on urban greenspace, including thinking about, growing, and protecting trees in our communities.

UrbanKind Institute's core belief is that cities should be built for people and with people — whose voices and experiences must be central to urban planning, design, and decisions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TREE PITTSBURGH

## Restoring and protecting the urban forest

Founded in Pittsburgh in 2006, Tree Pittsburgh grows, plants, and cares for trees in areas of our city that suffer from the lack of a tree canopy. A tree canopy occurs when trees, planted in the same area, grow tall and wide. The trees form a heat barrier of leaves and branches that offer residents cooling shade and beauty.

This work, done with great intention, is one way Tree Pittsburgh contributes to the broader movement for equity and justice.

Why the focus on city trees? A study by Vibrant Cities Lab has shown that the lack of trees in an area relates to

poor academic performance, more crime, serious health issues, and more deaths due to poor air quality and extreme heat. Residents of these treeless neighborhoods are more vulnerable to sickness and disease.

Tree Pittsburgh has created a master plan for protecting and improving the city's urban forest. The plan includes community tree care neighborhood events where residents can work with Tree Pittsburgh to plant and care for trees.

Learn more. Visit [treepittsburgh.org](http://treepittsburgh.org).