

## **PS 1.2**

### **CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION**

## | BACKGROUND

### Background

Already in 1902, there was an article published in the *Selma Morning Times* in US attributing a theory to the Swedish Nobel laureate Svante Arrhenius that coal combustion could cause global warming that eventually may lead to human extinction. In recent decades the evidence base on climate change has become stronger and the awareness in terms of its health impacts has increased. Approaching the UN General Assembly in September 2021, BMJ and more than 200 medical journals published a joint editorial concluding that science is unequivocal, urging world leaders to act on climate change, “A global increase of 1.5°C above the pre-industrial average and the continued loss of biodiversity risk catastrophic harm to health that will be impossible to reverse”. The climate crisis affects everybody, and urgent mitigation action is needed i.e., to cut greenhouse gas emissions, the drivers of climate change, and adaptation, i.e., actions taken to manage unavoidable impacts and new conditions.

How climate change is communicated may have a decisive impact on the ability to create awareness, inform and motivate decision makers, civil society, and different stake holders for both far reaching climate mitigation and extensive resources for adaptation. The central role of communication in such processes has constantly been emphasized by researchers in recent years, but it has not been reflected in the space given in scientific debates.

Climate change communication closely relates to health communication. The importance of incorporating health communication insights into climate change communication has been emphasized. Health communication has developed over a far longer period than climate change communication, with focus on encouraging behavior modification and social change. There is vast experience in health communication of intervening, framing, and segmenting different audiences on relevant factors needed for tailored communication, to engage, empower, influence individuals and communities.

Climate communication emerged as a research area in the beginning of the 1990's. For a long time, it mostly focused on awareness raising regarding climate change. During the last decade it has included aspects such as motivation, capacities, enabling, empowerment, civic engagement and public participation, organizational strategies, and persuasive strategies to affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Social marketing, widely used in public health interventions for decades, has also been more frequently used in climate change public engagement. There has also been growing attention to how climate change messages are framed to foster greater engagement. It has been suggested that communicating health effects could be a way to motivate people to change to low energy lifestyles. This potentially could occur in several ways; from avoiding negative direct health effects from climate change to embracing health benefits from mitigation and adaptation activities. Climate change communication has a lot to learn from health communication and by strengthening the knowledge base the power of communication can lead to greater impact regarding climate change action on both individual and societal level.

Previous research on agenda setting has shown that the amount of media coverage a topic receives correlates strongly with the public's opinion of how important the topic is. Though, in the social media era there is also a social media agenda to consider in agenda setting processes when discussing factors that could mediate change. The rapid increase in the use of social media in recent decades has led to an increase in mis- and disinformation. From the 1950s, the tobacco industry organized campaigns as part of a cohesive strategy, the so called “tobacco strategies” to raise doubts that smoking could be harmful to health and hereby delay regulations and legislation. It has frequently been reported how the fossil fuel industry uses the tobacco strategies for the same purpose. The main lesson from tobacco history is that delay in agreeing on international policy and poor implementation will cost countless lives. Today, climate change is one of the topics that has been most subjected to organized disinformation. Social media networks are also fertile ground for misinformation. It circulates online, is disseminated to the public and discussed in established media, and in the worst case it can influence decision-makers.

## | OBJECTIVES

### Objectives

- Describe what climate communication is and explore how climate communication can produce engagement and action in decision makers, the general public and other stakeholders.
- Discuss how the risks of climate change can be communicated to provide change and action instead of creating passivity making people lose hope.
- Share knowledge how climate change can be communicated to different audiences (i.e., different countries, different levels of education, generations, etc.).
- Explore the role of health in climate communication.
- Show examples of how messages can be formulated and framed to create engagement.
- Discuss climate change misinformation and disinformation, specifically on social media and how risks can be counteracted.



Moderator

## Maria Nilsson

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### Bio - Professor Maria Nilsson

Maria Nilsson is a professor of Public Health, with the orientation climate change and health, based at the department of Epidemiology and Global Health, Umeå University, Sweden. Her PhD was in epidemiology and public health sciences and her main research focus is weather, climate and climate change and health impacts, with a specific interest for adaptation and vulnerable populations.

Professor Nilsson conducts and lead research in low to high income countries, some examples of topics: weather and weather extremes in association to mental health in Vietnam, heat exposure and health outcomes in Costa Rican sugarcane harvesters, climate change aspects on health in northern Sweden, household reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and dengue risk communication in local Indonesian communities. In recent years she has started a research line on climate change communication and behavior change and leads a WP on the topic in the Horizon project CATALYSE. She co-authored and was the integrating editor for health in the 2015 "Lancet Commission - Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health". From the start of the global "Lancet Countdown 2030 on Health and Climate Change" in 2016 she has been a member of the working group on adaptation, planning, and resilience for health. In September 2021 she became the chair of the new initiative Lancet Countdown in Europe, established as a research collaboration with the mission to monitor health and climate change with annual updates for the region. Professor Nilsson was a member of two Working Groups of the European Academies Science Advisory Council in 2018 - 2021, one on climate change and health and one on decarbonisation of buildings. She has publications in high impact journals such as the Lancet, Lancet Planetary health, Lancet Public Health, and the BMJ.

In connection to her projects, she is engaged in knowledge translation to increase the awareness and understanding of climate change and health impacts, working actively to feed research evidence into policy and practice. She is a member of the health committee of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences.

Professor Nilsson is the Editor in Chief for the science journal Global Health Action. Under her leadership the journal seeks to contribute a concrete, hands-on approach to addressing the global health challenges brought to the fore by the impact of globalization.