

# Iowa Climate Statement 2024: Individual Actions to Help Solve the Climate Crisis

Earth's global surface temperature in 2023 was the highest since measurement began 174 years ago. This contributed to 28 separate billion-dollar disasters in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> In Iowa, the past 25 years have brought heat waves and more climate change-induced economic disasters caused by rainfall increases, flooding, humidity, and extreme winds. These impacts are projected to become even more severe in Iowa's near future.

Students we work with feel anxious about the climate crisis; a survey of 10,000 young people found 84% report being moderately to extremely worried about climate change, with over 60% responding that it makes them feel sad, afraid, and anxious.<sup>2</sup> This anxiety manifests in multiple ways: some students report that they will forgo having children, others worry about their physical and financial health. Given these overwhelming concerns, students often ask what they can do about climate change.

We recognize that big change is needed: through international bodies (UNEP); federal, state and local governments; corporations; and NGOs, but engagement on the larger stage often begins with individual and collective actions at the local level. By taking action and connecting with others, we can replace disillusionment with empowerment. This impacts markets and makes it less expensive for individuals to effect change, which eases climate anxiety. Many compilations of positive actions exist;<sup>3</sup> here we share a few general strategies that can be effective.

**Efficiency updates save money and benefit society.** Due to significant incentives from recent legislation (e.g., the Inflation Reduction Act), purchase of upgraded efficient electric appliances, residential weatherization, electric vehicles, or home solar arrays are cheaper and more accessible than ever. These efforts reduce emissions and benefit society by improving air quality, reducing healthcare costs, and creating more resilient communities.

**"Teamwork makes the dream work."** No single person can tackle the enormity of climate change. Working with community members to identify and take on achievable goals inspires others and multiplies our impact. Supporting local, place-based actions is less overwhelming than efforts at the national and international level. Students have reported tangible benefits and enjoyment from working with local leaders and like-minded peers to find solutions.

**Changes reap rewards.** Until it's attempted, change seems difficult. Biking or walking instead of driving produce significant physical and mental health benefits. A diet based around more vegetables can similarly benefit health and add enjoyable diversity in your diet.

**Choosing wisely to promote community health.** Addressing the climate crisis is an opportunity to think about the choices you have when you consume. Climate and community health are improved when we spend time and money on local experiences/social activities. Passion for work or volunteer activities leads to improved well-being compared to spending on disposable goods.<sup>4</sup>

By taking action, we can dispel hopelessness and feel confident that we have stepped up to the challenge of climate change. To be sure, individual actions alone are insufficient – collective action from individuals using their voices and votes is a powerful way to effect necessary changes to promptly address climate change. Individual adoption of pro-climate activities is important, enjoyable, and empowering, leading toward the development of policies that are critical to achieving climate stability and avoiding catastrophic consequences.

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