

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



<https://www.virginiaclinicians.org/>

Letter from our Chair

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Since our founding in 2017, our group of eight clinicians meeting in a hospital conference room has grown into a network of over 600 supporters. The work of VCCA advocates is becoming a standard for climate solutions in hospitals, communities, and the state.

In this report, we describe VCCA's significant accomplishments of 2024. We started strong, with our biggest Advocacy Day yet. More than 70 health professionals and students in white coats came to Richmond and met with over 60 legislators about the health harms of climate change and the benefits of solutions.

Throughout the year, we answered the call to join local government partnerships. VCCA members are participating in projects in Roanoke, Charlottesville, Arlington County, and Alexandria, reflecting the growing recognition that health must be incorporated into climate planning and recognizing that VCCA is the organization to provide this expertise.

VCCA pursued its deep commitment to education, with members delivering lectures at state and national hospitals and medical conferences for professionals and trainees. We co-hosted health conferences in Williamsburg, Charlottesville, and Roanoke. Our continued collaboration with the University of Virginia Environmental Law Clinic supports our legal climate advocacy work. And we launched a new initiative with George Mason University to study the health effects of Virginia's expanding data center industry.

Perhaps most importantly, we created our new board of directors. I am so proud of the deep commitment of these outstanding leaders. As the health impacts of heat and extreme weather rise, our board members are stepping up to ensure that VCCA meets the growing need for our expertise.

Together, we have built the framework for climate and health solutions in Virginia. Your commitment and financial support ensure that we meet the growing need for our health voice.

Samantha Andoot, MD

Chair



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About Us

Organizational Overview & Strategic Priorities

Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action (VCCA) was founded in 2017. Since then, we have boldly pursued our mission: to educate and mobilize clinician leaders to bring the health voice to climate policymaking in Virginia.

In 2024, VCCA is established as an integral and effective organization in the climate advocacy space. Its network of over 600 clinicians can be activated for climate action at the local, state, and federal level.

VCCA has had a significant impact on clean energy advocacy in Virginia and is achieving the ambitious goals outlined in its 2022 three-year strategic plan. Our growth and effective program development have attracted the support of additional funders.



2024 General Assembly Advocacy Day

VCCA's 2024 Advocacy Day was our largest event to date. More than 70 clinicians participated, sharing their personal stories and expertise on the effects of climate change on health with over 60 legislators. We told lawmakers about our climate and health priorities, outlining how policies addressing parking lot solar, data centers, comprehensive health planning, and tree canopies all affect the health of Virginians. WUSA-TV covered the event and interviewed VCCA Chair of Advocacy Dr. Robert Kitchen.

We announced the winners of our three annual awards. Dr. Scott Doney, the Joe D. and Helen J. Kington Professor in Environmental Change at the University of Virginia, was presented with the Climate and Health Teaching Award. Dr. Susan Miller was presented with the Climate and Health Advocacy Award. Dr. Jerome Paulson was presented with our Climate and Health Leadership Award.



General Assembly Legislative Outcomes

During the 2024 session, VCCA discussed the health benefits of climate policy with legislators including healthy community creation in comprehensive planning, shared solar access, expansion of parking lot solar, and preservation of tree canopies. We also defended previously passed legislation on rules for clean cars.

These initiatives received broad bipartisan support. While some were ultimately vetoed, we look forward to supporting these issues again in 2025.



Attendees of the 2024 VCCA General Assembly Climate and Health Advocacy Day.

Legislative victories from this session include:

- Shared solar legislation expansion, introduced by Senator Scott Surovell and Delegate Rip Sullivan, which benefits Appalachian Power customers, allowing them to access low-cost renewable energy without owning solar panels.
- The Clean Energy Innovation Authority (formerly the Green Bank), which enables Virginia to use federal funds for clean energy projects, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving health statewide.
- The bipartisan SAVE Act, which promotes energy efficiency and brings economic benefits and pollution reduction to Virginia.

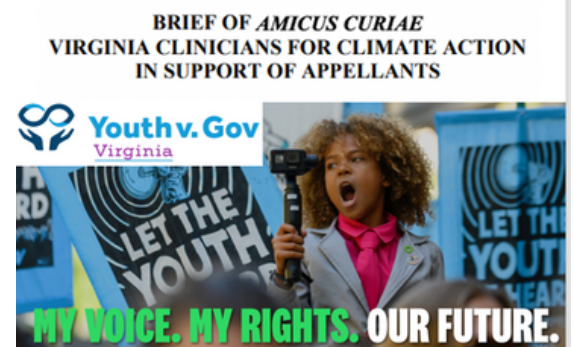
Advocacy

VCCA brought the health voice in support of climate solutions to dozens of events across Virginia throughout the year. We co-sponsored the Henrico Climate Solutions Town Hall, participated in regulatory hearings, submitted amicus briefs in support of RGGI and youth plaintiffs in a climate lawsuit, supported Rep. Jennifer McClellan's federal resolution on children and climate disasters, wrote opinion pieces, submitted comments to state regulatory bodies, and much more.

Advocacy Committee Chair Dr. Robert Kitchen spoke at a Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (*pictured at right*) meeting about the health challenges associated with data center expansion. We are completing a research paper on this topic to use in our 2025 advocacy work.



Healthcare Sustainability Committee member Dr. Varun Dixit at Henrico Climate Solutions Town Hall.



In September, VCCA leader Dr. Janice Hawkins, nurse educator at Old Dominion University, spoke to the World Affairs Council on health and climate change at Virginia Wesleyan University.

Education

In 2024, VCCA offered climate and health lectures and events across the state, including at UVA Schools of Medicine and Nursing, Inova, Carilion Clinic, and Shenandoah University. We created Virginia's only state-specific educational materials on climate and health, conducted research on health and data centers, and tabled at numerous public and medical events. Our Education Committee now includes students from 11 regional health professional schools who are bringing climate and health programming to their curricula. VCCA Vice-Chair Dr. Abigail Hankin-Wei will be presenting to the Virginia Department of Health in 2025.

VCCA
Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action

CONNECTING HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN VIRGINIA

ECOSYSTEM HEALTH LINKS
Human, animal, plant, and ecosystem health are all connected. Addressing these links is essential for protecting the health of Virginians.

Our natural and managed ecosystems, from the Shenandoah Valley, to the Piedmont and Coastal Plain, are increasingly subject to pressures of climate change. This has serious consequences for the health of plants, animals and people. Ecosystem harms ultimately impact Virginia's economy, communities and way of life.

EMERGING HEALTH THREATS

Heatwaves in the Southeast are happening more often and the heat season is longer. Heat waves are longer and stronger in some cities.

Higher temperatures increase smog and wildfire smoke. These worsen air quality, harming our lungs, hearts, and brains and creating a risk for newborn infants.

Sea level in the Southeast rose by 6 inches on average between 1970-2020. Extreme rainfall can flood roads and overcome sewer systems.

THE ONE HEALTH APPROACH
One Health is an approach that is collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary. It aims to achieve optimal health by understanding how the health of people, animals, and their shared environments are connected.

From: <https://hhsa2023.globechange.gov/#/chapter/2/2>



Participants of the Climate, Heat and Health Summit, part of the NOAA-funded Heat Ready, Roanoke! campaign.



The Virginia Climate and Health Education Collaborative held its annual summit in May in Williamsburg, with seven schools participating. Through this network, VCCA has engaged new partners, including the nursing programs at two HBCUs, Virginia State and Norfolk State University.

Sustainability



Samim Atmar, Abigail Hankin-Wei, & Sara Wohlford
Climate Health Organizing
Fellows with Cambridge Health
Alliance and Harvard
University.

The U.S. health sector emits approximately 10% of national greenhouse gas emissions. VCCA is organizing to promote stronger healthcare sustainability measures through its Healthcare Sustainability Committee. The committee has hosted meetings with national healthcare sustainability leaders, which have over 500 YouTube views. Committee member Dr. Varun Dixit and his team at Henrico Doctor's Hospital won a Governor's Environmental Excellence Award at the Gold level for progress with recycling 200,000 lbs. of waste and conversion of the operating rooms to "low flow" anesthesia.

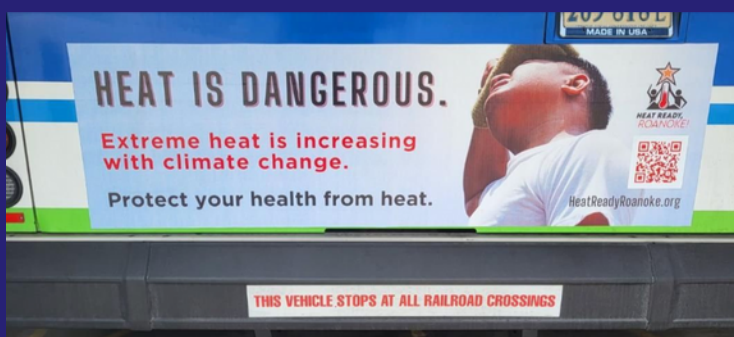
The committee has ambitious plans for 2025. These include the Healing Power Program to help rural health facilities and federally qualified health centers access solar power funding and a tree planting initiative with support from the Virginia Department of Forestry.

Supporters & Partners

VCCA is proud of its new board of directors with diverse regional, racial, and professional representation. We now have 638 supporters from across the Commonwealth, including 100 new supporters since June 2023. Throughout the year, VCCA partnered with universities, members of the U.S. Congress, and environmental groups. We brought the health perspective to climate initiatives in the cities of Roanoke, Hampton, and Alexandria, and in Henrico, Fairfax, Arlington, and Albermarle Counties.



At Roanoke's Williamson Road Library event on June 8, over 100 families learned about heat and health and gave feedback on how to make their neighborhoods cooler.



VCCA was proud to partner in the NOAA-funded grant, "Heat Ready, Roanoke!". As part of this program, VCCA developed a bus advertisement on heat, health, and climate change. Running on 10 buses in Roanoke from June through September, it was seen by estimated **four million people**.

In the News

VCCA supporters have written or been featured in over 120 media pieces. Below are just a few from the past year:



Dr. Varun Dixit, cardiac anesthesiologist, Henrico Doctor's Hospital, North American Partners in Anesthesia, Richmond, VA

"The Race to Zero: Greening Our Meetings"

October review article in the American Society of Anesthesiologists *ASA Monitor* co-authored by VCCA supporter Dr. Varun Dixit

"RGGI Provides Health, Economic Benefits."

June letter in *Richmond-Times Dispatch* by Dr. Samantha Ahdoot and Sen. Ghazala F. Hashmi

"In Virginia, Pollution Is OK as Long as It Hurts Everyone. Are We OK with This?"

September article in the *Richmond-Times Dispatch* by Dr. Samantha Ahdoot

"Serving Up Climate Education: An Innovative Resident Curriculum Addressing Climate Change through Plant-Based Solutions"

June article in *ScienceDirect* co-authored by VCCA Food and Nutrition Committee Co-Chair Dr. Shirley Kalwaney and pediatric resident Dr. Margaret Hofstedt



Dr. Shirley Kalwaney, VCCA Food and Nutrition Committee Co-Chair

"Prioritizing Health: The EPA Must Seize the Opportunity to Make Our Air Cleaner"

January article in *The Hill* by VCCA Steering Committee member Neelu Tummala, MD

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Funding & Grants

Regional Partnerships

In 2024 VCCA was selected to join two grant-funded regional projects.

The Climate Resilience Cohort is part of the Resilient Together project in Albemarle County and Charlottesville, Virginia. Funded by an EPA Environmental Justice grant, the program includes a coalition of Charlottesville-area organizations which will plan and implement new programs to engage underrepresented populations in climate planning over the next three years.



VCCA will join Arlington County, the Virginia Climate Center at George Mason University, and other technical partners to develop an **Energy-Health-Equity Project** (EHE Project) in early 2025. This will be a three-year initiative funded by an EPA Environmental Justice grant. The project aims to incentivize developers and property owners in low-income communities to improve climate, energy, and public health indicators through efficiency upgrades and development projects.



Board of Directors



Samantha Ahdoot, MD
Chair



Mohamed Ahmed, MS
Treasurer



Vaishali Geib, MD
Fund Development Committee



Abigail Hankin-Wei, MD
Vice-Chair



Shirley Kalwany-Patel, MD
Secretary



Tracy Kelly, RN
Education Committee



Robert Kitchen, MD
Advocacy Committee



Natalie Linwong, MD
Food and Nutrition Committee



Irène Mathieu, MD
Climate Justice Committee



Joanne Ondrush, MD
Healthcare Sustainability Committee



Jerome Paulson, MD
Program Committee



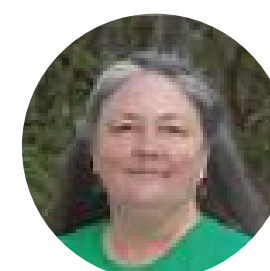
Vivienne Pierce McDaniel, RN
Climate Justice Committee



Bruce Ruscio, DrPh
Governance Committee



Nick Snow, MD
Education Committee



Pam Tinker, BA, MAIS
Governance Committee



Homan Wai, MD
Education Committee



Malinda Whitlow, RN
Climate Justice Committee



Get in Touch

VCCA provides leadership and engagement opportunities for Virginia-based clinicians.

Contact us to find out how you can be involved in one of our many initiatives or to serve on one of our committees (Education, Healthcare Sustainability, Climate Justice, Food & Nutrition, Advocacy).



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