

Health Approaches to Climate Change:

How do health care providers and public health professionals approach climate change differently?

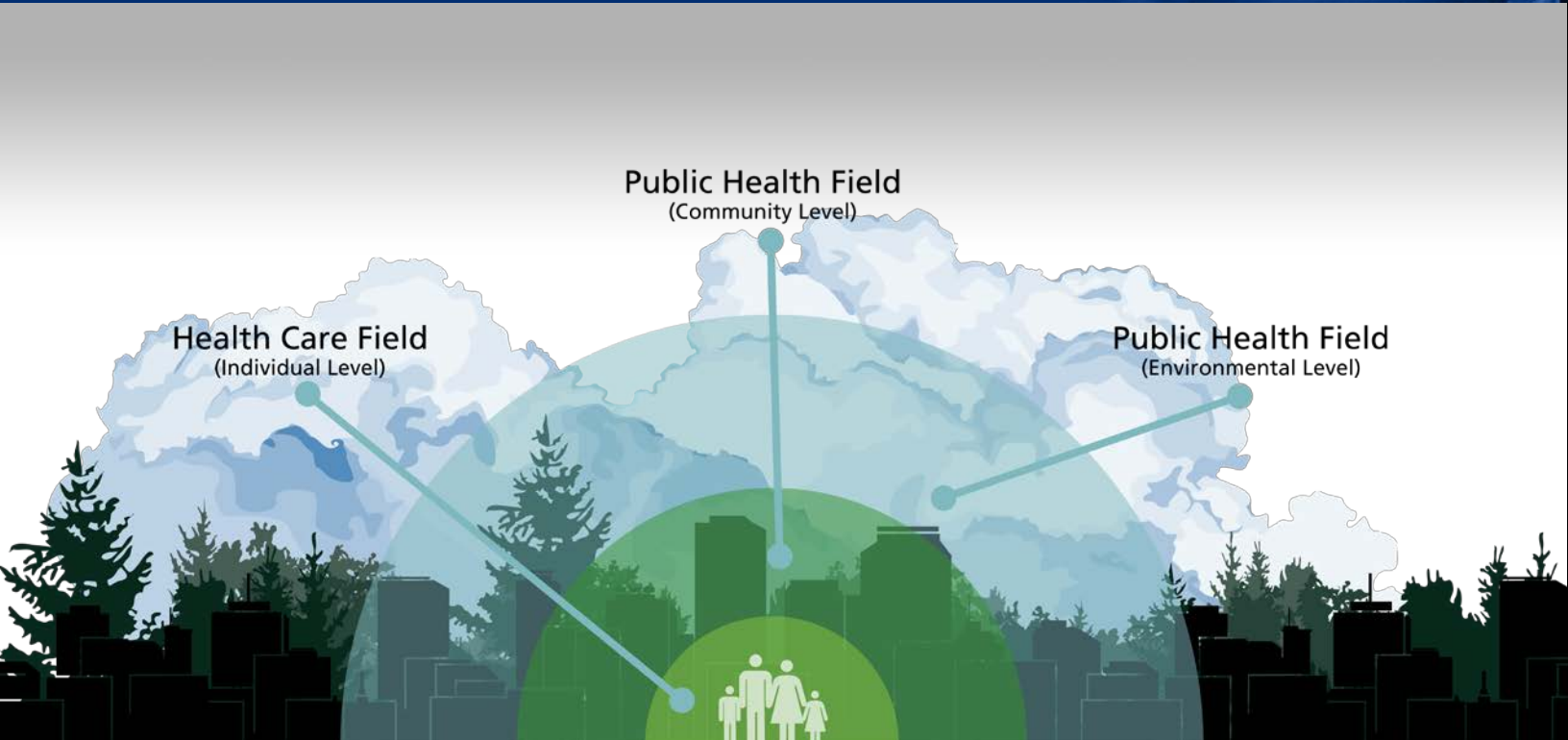


Health care providers offer treatment.

When individuals suffer harm as a result of climate change or climate events, they seek medical attention to treat heat stroke from rising temperatures, asthma from increased air pollution, water-borne illness from flooding, Lyme disease from expanding host habitat or injury after a devastating storm and to cope with mental wellness issues after job, family, housing or other loss or injury following an extreme weather event.

The public health field focuses on prevention, detection and management.

Public health professionals work to understand and educate the public on the health consequences of climate change; help communities prepare for climate events by providing heat wave warnings, air quality index alerts, water safety testing, mosquito control programs, storm warnings and more; and coordinate detection, tracking and management of public health emergencies.



Differences between how healthcare providers address climate change and how public health professionals address climate change, a few examples:



Health care field

*Individual focus

Ex: Treating a patient for heat stroke due to the extreme temperatures of climate change.

*Emphasis on disease diagnosis, treatment and care for the individual patient

Ex: Testing a patient for parasites following a flood/extreme rainfall or severe storm event in their community.

*Medical paradigm places predominant emphasis on medical care or treatment

Ex: A doctor providing antibiotics and/or pain medication for a patient with Lyme disease, which can be contracted later in the season and in a larger geographical area due to the warmer temperatures of climate change.



Public health field

*Population focus

Ex: Promoting heat wave warning systems to help communities prepare for heat waves.

*Emphasis on disease prevention and health promotion for the whole community

Ex: Monitoring and testing water for contaminants.

Ex: Assisting communities in implementing climate adaption plans.

*Interventions aimed at the environment, human behavior and lifestyle and medical care

Ex: Working with mosquito control program officers to predict insect outbreak hot spots and preparing the public in those areas.

Ex: Coordinating with community organizations to promote insect repellent or long-sleeved clothes.

Ex: Spreading information or holding information sessions on how to safely use insect repellent and which repellent to use.