

Book Review

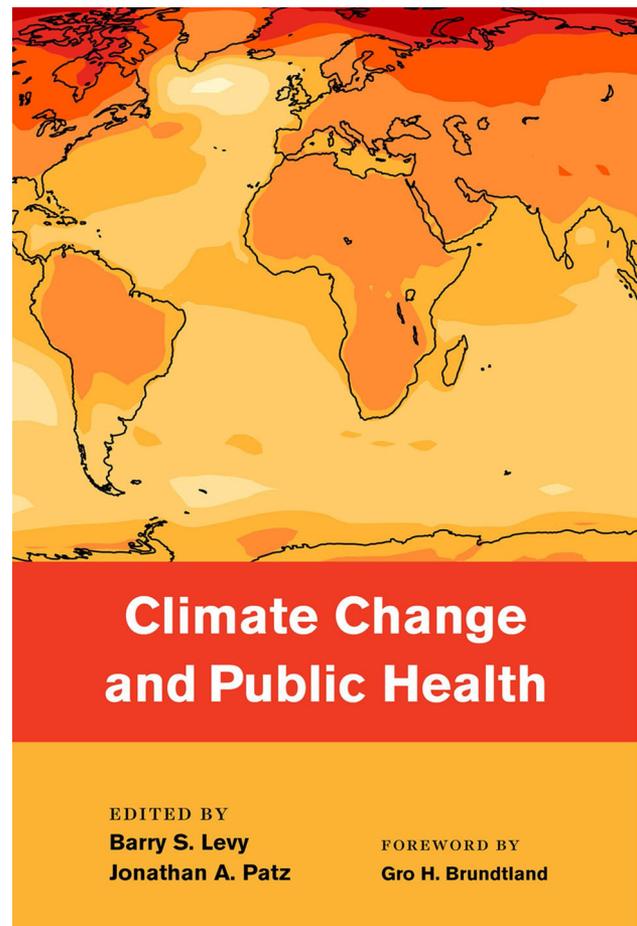
The Big Challenge: Climate and Health

CLIMATE CHANGE AND PUBLIC HEALTH,
BARRY S. LEVY, JONATHAN A. PATZ, 2015,
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

The late and much loved Prof Tony McMichael, to whom the book *Climate Change and Public Health* is dedicated, tells us in Chapter 3 the story of an inebriated man searching for his lost car keys only in the illuminated region under a lamp post because, “that’s where the light is”. Prof McMichael then uses this story to warn that it is tempting for researchers to choose research priorities only under the figurative lamp post, that is, asking only those questions that are directly amenable to conventional research methods. He calls upon future researchers to “widen their horizons and their skills”, to “embrace new concepts and methods”, to “understand the dynamics of complex systems” and to “engage in genuinely interdisciplinary research”. This first-rate book edited by Barry S Levy and Jonathan A Patz indeed honours these sentiments and is a valuable resource for researchers, students and policy makers working in the field of climate change and health.

Published in 2015, this dense book of 442 pages (with some sections using a font perhaps too small for presbyopic readers) includes 15 chapters divided into three parts and takes readers from the basic science of climate change in chapter one right through to the role of NGOs in the final chapter. With the perspectives of 78 leading experts in public health and environmental science, the book successfully provides an expansive platform for students, researchers, policymakers and advocates working at the nexus between climate change and public health.

The introductory Part 1 covers important conceptual issues and key concepts in climate science, and also explores the need for a widening research agenda. Part 2 gets into the nitty-gritty of specific health consequences of cli-



mate change, working its way through the usual suspects of heatwaves, respiratory disorders, allergic disorders, vector-borne diseases, water-borne and food-borne diseases, nutrition security, mental health impacts and violence. Part 3 focuses on policies and actions to address climate change, exploring societal solutions from the various sectors—public health, energy, transportation, agriculture and communications. It also has two interesting chapters exploring healthy and sustainable built environments and the

roles of NGOs, individuals, civil society organisations and the private sector.

This is not the first edited volume exploring the field of climate change and health, with recent excellent books by Butler (2014) and Luber and Lemery (2015). It shares the challenge all multi-author books face in bringing together numerous experts without losing the integration and consistency of style between the chapters. Otherwise, it is fair for readers to ask what is the true benefit of buying a book rather than cherry picking separate expert journal articles. Patz and Levy have also succeeded in integrating the flow of the book chapters, especially by the use of very informative boxes that summarise the key concepts being discussed in each chapter. Students, in particular, will appreciate these boxes because they beautifully distill the key issues they need to know.

Another risk for books about climate change is engendering despair in the reader. Editors face the challenge of being comprehensive and accurate on the one hand, and, at the same time, not leaving readers despondent. I was pleased to see that one third of the book, the entire part three, was dedicated to solutions. This included education and communication within the broader community, greening of the health sector, advancing energy policy, transportation policy, agricultural policy, and planning healthy and sustainable living environments. An additional chapter on my wish list would be a discussion on the role of the private sector, which as one of the most powerful forces on the planet, deserves greater attention. For example, some in-depth discussion about the current trend towards social impact investing would have been useful.

The audience for this book is broad. First, it is most suitable for health and environmental students from undergraduate and postgraduate level. In our course at the University of Melbourne, *Environmental Challenges and Global Health*, we have already made this book a recom-

mended reading. In addition, this is a great book to assist research students to understand the very broad interdisciplinary skills required to work in this field, incorporating epidemiology, environmental science, ecology, ethics, law, global health, health systems, communication and media, nutrition, biology, biostatistics, occupational health and other disciplines. If I could wish for one more additional chapter in the book, I would like to have read more about the interrelationships of these many disciplines and the importance of systems thinking in bringing them together.

The book is indeed worthy of its thoughtful foreword by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Former Director of the World Health Organisation, who reminds the reader that our current path is unsustainable and that shortsighted, often narrow political and economic interests repeatedly supersede common interests and common responsibilities. She also reminds the reader that time is running out. I think the book adds much to the momentum of scholarly and political attention that will inspire and engage a new generation of climate change and health researchers to tackle this, one of the greatest challenges of our time.

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REFERENCES

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- Luber G, Lemery J (2015) *Global Climate Change and Human Health: From Science to Practice*, Jossey-Bass, APHA Press (an imprint of American Public Health Association, San Francisco, CA, Washington, DC).

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