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## CNCA Resource: COVID-Climate Messaging

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As a resource for our members, we've compiled many of the narratives surfacing publicly in the press connecting COVID to climate change. The thought leader quotes and messaging recommendations below make the climate crisis relevant and accessible within the COVID-impacted realities of our communities.

The quotes and messaging recommendations below represent just a sampling of the thought leadership in this space and will hopefully serve as useful guidance for anyone interested in using similar messaging and framing, as the precedent has already been set on the messaging front by the thought leaders below.

If cities are using similar messages and framing, please send quotes to CNCA to include as we build out this living document. If there are messages/frames outside of what's appended below, please send that to CNCA as well so that we can add to the categories below.

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## 1. Identifying Scale & Scope

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### *Talking Points:*

**"Climate change and coronavirus share a similar magnitude, affecting every country on earth." ([Source](#))**

**"Climate change and coronavirus affect different nations, and different communities, with varying degrees of severity." ([Source](#))**

### *Examples:*

**"Both the pandemic and the climate crisis are problems of exponential growth against a limited capacity to cope."**

– *Elizabeth Sawin, co-director of Climate Interactive*



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**“Both are characterized by an escalating probability of disaster. Tackling either problem will disrupt our lifestyles in a number of ways, some of which are quite similar. In both cases, there is a coordination problem: the efforts of any one individual will achieve nothing to mitigate the risk unless accompanied by efforts from many others. And in both cases, authorities acknowledge the urgency of acting.”**

– *David Comerford, Program Director, Behavioural Science Centre of the University of Stirling*

**“Wealthy people in wealthy societies are able to simply go home and not worry too much about their jobs, while there are multitudes that are much more vulnerable than us.” The same calculus applies, in broad strokes, to climate change, which affects disproportionately the developing world—in particular Asia.**

– *Dr. Joaquim Vieira Ferreira Levy, former World Bank CFO*

**“COVID-19 is climate on warp speed.”**

– *Gernot Wagner, climate economist at New York University and co-author of Climate Shock*

**“[Climate models suggest] that the rapid weather variability in autumn will continue to strengthen in some regions of northern mid-latitudes in a warming climate, implying that the risk of an influenza epidemic may increase 20% to 50% in some highly populated regions in the later 21st century.”**

– *Qi Liu et al, IOPScience*

## 2. Understanding and Communicating Risk

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### **Talking Point:**

**“Coronavirus shows us how to communicate climate risk.”**

### **Examples:**

**“If media outlets and governments could coordinate to clarify the nature of climate risk, coronavirus shows us that the public are more than capable of responding appropriately.”**

– *David Comerford, Program Director, Behavioural Science Centre of the University of Stirling*



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In examining the exponential growth curve of COVID-19, a UPenn Professor realized there is a teachable moment about the dangers of climate change: **“Getting people to recognize the likelihood of these things happening over a period of time, or bad things happening in 20 or 30 years, as in climate change, has to be put on the table. And maybe we can do something if people will focus on those things.”**

– *Howard Kunreuther, University of Pennsylvania Wharton Professor*

**“A crisis like this brings to people's minds that maybe the risk we’ve been talking about with climate change is not so far-fetched.”**

– *Dr. Joaquim Vieira Ferreira Levy, Brazilian economist and former chief financial officer of the World Bank*

**“Risk communication needs to enable people to make decisions, rather than just better understand decisions institutions have made for them. Future models for risk communication could start to move away from a top-down model where evidence is dictated to the public by scientists and professional leaders, towards models which better equip the public to join the conversation and contextualise the situation.”**

– *Clio Heslop, British Science Association*

Taking a lesson from COVID-19 crisis communications:

- **“Communication must be balanced and should not be apologetic** about issuing rebuttals when the information is wrong.
- Instructions and guidance should **use images** or infographics instead of (or in addition to) graphs, have statistical clarity and be consistent.
- Provide a denominator and **a reference point which people have an intuitive understanding of.**
- Responses need to **chime with public values**, and **tell compelling stories** with the evidence, so that the debate is not between statistics and emotions or individual case studies. **Include real terms and real-life examples** where possible and compare the risk factor in question to other everyday life risks.



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- **Make the parameters clear**, especially the timescale of the risk **and the impact it will have.**  
– *British Science Association*

### 3. Understanding Human Impact

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**Talking Point:** “Coronavirus and climate change show how human behavior and environmental change are linked.”

**Examples:** “Increasingly, these **zoonotic diseases are linked to environmental change and human behaviour**. The disruption of pristine forests driven by logging, mining, road building through remote places, rapid urbanisation and population growth is bringing people into closer contact with animal species they may never have been near before.”

– *Kate Jones, chair of ecology and biodiversity at UCL*

“Nature is sending us a message. Our continued erosion of wild spaces has brought us uncomfortably close to animals and plants that harbor diseases that can jump to humans. There are too many pressures at the same time on our natural systems and something has to give. **We are intimately interconnected with nature, whether we like it or not. If we don’t take care of nature, we can’t take care of ourselves.** And as we hurtle towards a **population of 10 billion people on this planet, we need to go into this future armed with nature as our strongest ally.**”

– *Inger Anderson, UN environment chief*

“In principle, loss of biodiversity could either increase or decrease disease transmission. However, **mounting evidence indicates that biodiversity loss frequently increases disease transmission**. The species that thrive when biodiversity declines are the species that are best at transmitting diseases.”

– *Felicia Keesing et al, Nature Magazine*

**"There's this insidious cycle.** Climate change is driven, obviously, by changes in gases. Those are driven by animals, both directly and indirectly, as you clear out space for them to graze or for the



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grains you feed them. **That's a very strong connection between climate change and these diseases."**

– *Dennis Carroll, former head of U.S. Agency for International Development's emerging threats program*

"We have an opportunity now to not just push for a new generation of environment laws, but to re-evaluate the whole deal, to **cultivate a new political settlement based on ecological principles of living well together in harmony with the natural world, understanding our place as part of it** as First Peoples did for millennia, with **an economy designed to serve people and planet."**

– *Tim Hollo is executive director of the Green Institute and visiting fellow at The Australian National University's School of Regulation and Global Government.*

### 4. Valuing Science

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**Talking Point:**

**"Coronavirus shows us how critical science is when estimating risk."**

**Examples:**

**"Societies around the world must learn to value science and the warnings of scientists when they make projections about terrible but plausible scenarios. Societies and countries need to respect objective facts and not be in denial of things they simply don't want to face."**

– *Michael Gerard, Jeffrey Shaman, Columbia University*

**"It's been clear for some time the importance of amplifying that climate scientists around the world agree that the planet is warming due to human activities and that this is causing devastating impacts that will worsen if emissions are not cut dramatically. This remains true and may resonate more as COVID-19 highlights the essential need to have data and experts guide policy decisions."**

– *Cara Pike, Executive Director, Climate Access*



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### 5. Promoting Collaboration

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**Talking Point:**

**“Climate change and coronavirus both require the role of government in coping with crises.”** ([Source](#))

**“National and global crises such as coronavirus and climate change make the case for robust government, requiring coordination of individuals, public and private institutions.”** ([Source](#))

**Examples:**

**“The world has achieved great things in the past by working together**—an example from the realm of infectious diseases being the eradication of smallpox. This effort succeeded because, when each country was assured that other countries would play their part, each had a strong incentive to play its part.”

– *Scott Barrett is vice dean of Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs*

**“Don’t rely on companies or workers to stay home or tell their people to stay home, **force them to do so or pay them to do so, but make sure it happens.** And of course, **that’s the role of government.** We are watching our political leaders learn these lessons live on TV, within days.”**

– *Gernot Wagner, climate economist at New York University and co-author of Climate Shock*

**“People cannot do this on their own. **It’s a common effort, and the way to organize it is through government.**”**

– *Dr. Joaquim Vieira Ferreira Levy, former World Bank CFO*

**“The response of government can aggravate or decrease the problem.** In Wuhan, for example, we saw how important public structures were, in spite of all the weaknesses: the fact that you have these hospitals; the fact that there was a rapid rush to find a vaccine; to build new facilities.” **A government’s slow reaction leads to huge loss of life. The same goes for climate action.**

– *Dr. Joaquim Vieira Ferreira Levy, former World Bank CFO*



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### 6. Promoting Optimism

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**Talking Point:** “Coronavirus response proves the world can act on climate change.”

**Examples:** “Governments, businesses and individuals around the world have undertaken unprecedented measures akin to wartime efforts. Coronavirus has shown that in order to avert the worst impacts of a global crisis, **world leaders need to come together to make bold change**. That means enacting policies, investing in innovative green technology, switching to clean energy and getting the public to change their daily habits. **The world has been given a trial run in global crisis management. It shouldn't waste it.**”

– *Helen Regan, CNN*

“The **policy changes required to mitigate climate change appear far less disruptive** — economically, socially and culturally — than the measures being taken right now to tackle COVID-19.”

– *Eric Galbraith, professor of earth system science at McGill University, and Ross Otto, assistant professor of psychology at McGill University*

### 7. Promoting Prevention

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**Talking Point:** “Coronavirus shows us how preparedness/prevention pays off.”

**Examples:** “Many of **the systems** that we’re seeing are **so crucial for addressing coronavirus** are also greatly **needed for addressing the health impacts of climate change**.”

– *Mona Sarfaty, Director of the Program on Climate and Health, George Mason University*

“COVID-19 crisis may **reinforce the value of preparedness for businesses and communities** and **help highlight opportunities to invest in adaptation and resilience**.”

– *Natalie Ambrosio, Four Twenty Seven*



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“Something that I'd like for us to try to **explore** a little more is **how good preparedness pays off**. With coronavirus, we have a case where staying in confinement means hopefully you get the virus under control, but then you get a lot of critics saying ‘we shut down the economy for nothing.’ But had we not, we’re talking about deaths in terms of six, seven figures.

– *Emilie Mazzacurati, founder and CEO of Berkeley-based climate risk analysis firm Four Twenty Seven*

“With greenhouse gases, you can’t see them; you can’t smell them; they don’t have an immediate health impact. It was very difficult to make the case for why we should reduce them. So, **we need to do a better job of explaining why these prevention and mitigation measures are critical for the economy, for people and for the health of everyone.**”

– *Dr. Barbara Buchner, Global Managing Director at the Climate Policy Initiative*

## 8. Promoting Sustainable Recovery

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### **Talking Point:**

**“Coronavirus response is an opportunity to reimagine and rebuild sustainable societies/structures.”**

### **Examples:**

“These changes give me hope. They give us the chance to save many lives. They even hint at **the possibility of longer term change that makes us happier** and helps us tackle climate change. Covid-19 is highlighting serious deficiencies in our existing system. The upside of this is the possibility that **we build a more humane system that leaves us more resilient in the face of future pandemics** and other impending crises like climate change.”

– *Simon Mair is a Research Fellow in Ecological Economics at the University of Surrey*

“Governments and financial institutions **should incorporate climate change action into their COVID-19 economic recovery plans**. We can use the current situation to step up our ambition to tackle climate change. **This is a huge opportunity we cannot miss.** Here the issue is not only the level of [stimulus] money, but the direction of the money.”





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– *Fatih Birol, head of the International Energy Agency*

**“Responding to these crises requires systemic change.** Expanding access to health care, addressing economic and racial inequities, building community connectedness and preparedness, and improving air and water quality are just some strategies that increase health and climate resilience.”

– *Cara Pike, Executive Director, Climate Access*

### 9. Promoting Well-Resourced Equitable Healthcare Systems

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**Talking Point:**

**“Coronavirus shows us how we must invest in strong equitable health systems.”**

**Examples:**

**“Well-resourced, equitable health systems with a strong and supported health workforce are essential** to protect us from health security threats, including climate change. The austerity measures that have strained many national health systems over the past decade will have to be reversed if economies and societies are to be resilient and prosperous in an age of change.”

– *Arthur Wyns, a climate change adviser to the World Health Organization*

**“The ongoing pandemic illustrates how inequality is a major barrier in ensuring the health and wellbeing of people, and how social and economic inequality materializes in unequal access to healthcare systems.** The same is true for the health impacts of climate change, with one of its major causes, the burning of fossil fuels, also adding pollution to the air and disproportionately impacting the health of those in poverty.”

– *Arthur Wyns, a climate change adviser to the World Health Organization*

**“COVID-19 is revealing the vulnerability of the systems we rely on and the need for systemic change to ensure safety, health and economic well-being.** Many factors that increase vulnerability to COVID-19 — including age, existing health conditions, income inequities, inadequate housing, employment type and racism — are also what create the greatest vulnerabilities to climate



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change.”

– *Cara Pike, Executive Director, Climate Access*

### 10. Promoting Behavior Change

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**Talking Point:**

**“Coronavirus shows us that behavior change and systems change are possible.”**

**Examples:**

**“If the coronavirus crisis has brought home anything, it’s that **we — each of us, separately and together — can change the system.** Your **mindful behavior is needed to avoid a breakdown of the system.**”**

– *Otto Scharmer, Senior Lecturer, MIT. Co-founder, Presencing Institute*

**“We’ll learn a lot more about the contexts in which travel can be avoided without great loss from face-to-face interaction. This could ultimately help us deal with climate change because **we will see what chunk of [our interactions] can be reduced by electronic communication.**”**

– *Michael Gerrard is a law professor and director of the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law*

**“The appetite for travel may be an ancient human urge, but global hypermobility is only a couple of decades old. Action on climate change may have restricted aviation; higher fares from reduced competition might yet do more. Now, **societies forced to do without flying may also start to question whether the habit was worth it.**”**

– *The Guardian*