

Climate Change and Youth Mental Health in Oregon



A Summary Report of
A Virtual Gathering of Youth on November 10th, 2021

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Event Sponsors:



Event Background:

In 2020, Governor Kate Brown directed the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to lead a study to better understand how climate change is impacting Youth mental health in Oregon. OHA's Climate and Health Program partnered with the University of Oregon (UO) to lead the study.

The Virtual Gathering for Youth was an opportunity for UO Researchers to present preliminary findings to youth in Oregon and provide an opportunity for youth to offer additional input.

Summary:

The event was planned in coordination with three youth advisors. An additional 4 youth facilitators helped to facilitate breakout sessions during the event.

The event included remarks from Jackie Yerby, the Governor's Policy Advisor for Behavioral Health and Health Licensing, and a video message was sent from Governor Kate Brown who was attending the COP26 UN Climate Talks in Scotland at the time of the event.

There were 30 people in attendance and approximately 20 identified as youth. After the preliminary study findings were presented, youth participants were asked to discuss the following questions in youth-only breakout discussions:

- *What stood out to you about the study findings?*
- *What was shared that you can relate to?*
- *What would you like to amplify or underline?*

Summary of Youth Input:

Youth facilitators shared highlights from the youth discussions and the following themes emerged:

- Youth share a feeling of being over-burdened by the responsibility to fix the climate crises in their lifetime.
- Youth touched on the intersections with racial equity and share a strong interest/value in climate justice.
- There was a shared desire for BIPOC and youth voices to be amplified in climate policy and decision-making.
- They talked about a need to re-frame mental health dialogue around wellness, rather than around pathology/clinical approaches to diagnosis and treatment.
- They would like to see both climate resilience and mental health integrated and normalized into school culture and curriculums.
- Youth participants expressed a desire for more opportunities/forums for youth to come together and share their experiences and perspectives on this topic, as well as intergenerational and community spaces for this discussion.

12 youth participants completed a post-event survey. The following quotes are selected from survey responses:

“Its a topic that is very needed and unfortunately very overlooked!!”

“I hope that this information is taken and the education is implemented in schools, because I think it would be very influential to teenagers and kids who are feeling stressed or anxious about the climate disaster. Thank you so much for this opportunity to think about this in such a safe space :)”

Conclusion

The virtual youth gathering demonstrated that there is an interest in engaging youth in conversations and served to further validate the findings of the mental health related to climate change and validated the preliminary findings from the Youth mental health study conducted in partnership with the University of Oregon.

This event also served as a successful pilot for the Climate and Health program to partner with youth advisors to plan and facilitate a virtual event for youth.