

Climate Change and Youth Mental Health

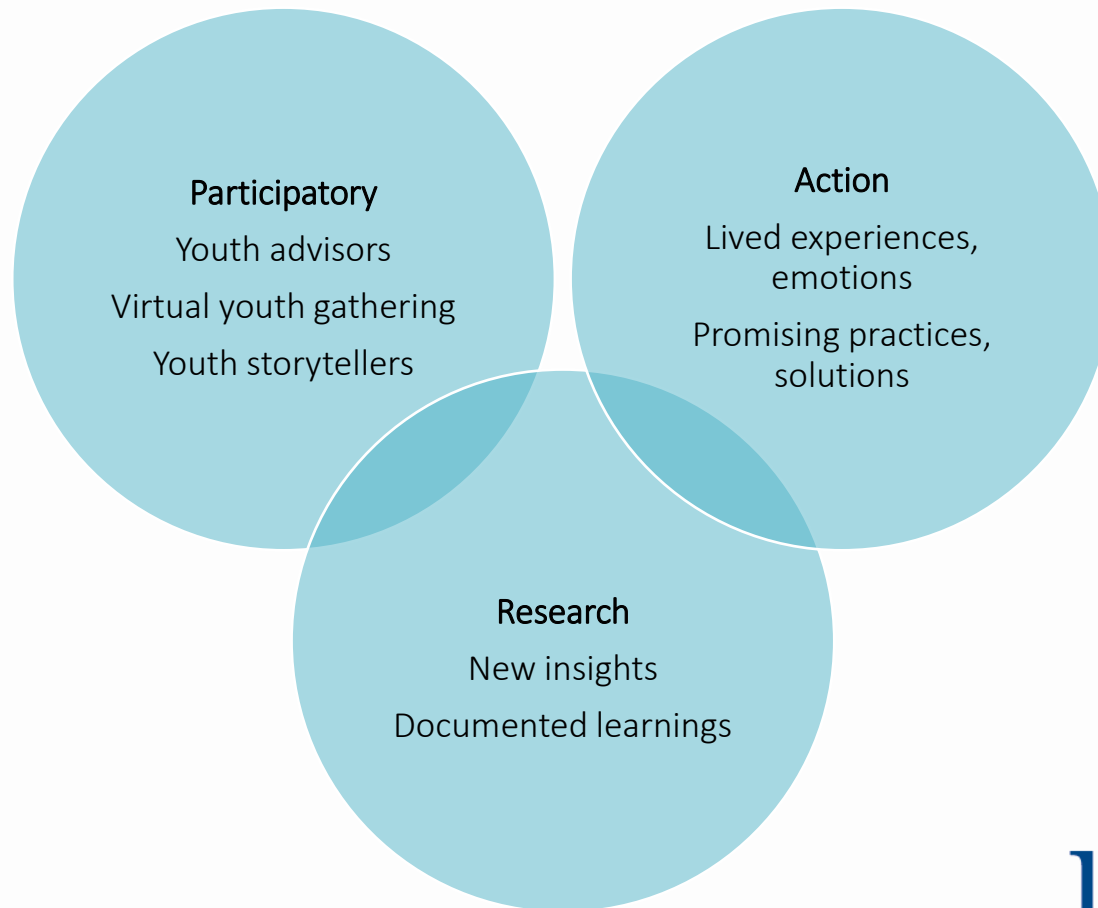
Julie Early Sifuentes, MS
Emily York, MPH

Presented by
Alyssa McClean, MPH

Project Partners



Methodology



Study Approach

Qualitative, centering the voices of youth, especially tribal youth and youth of color

- Population-level mental health
- Prevention
- Grounded in cultural and community knowledge
- Trauma-informed

Data gathering

Five focus groups across the state

Interviews with mental health, education, public health sectors

Youth story circles in the Phoenix Talent School District

Literature Review



Youth storytellers

A close-up photograph of a person's hand cupped behind their ear, symbolizing listening or learning. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. The text "What did we learn?" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font.

What did we
learn?



Climate Change & Mental Health

- Climate-related disasters
- Environmental degradation
- Climate anxiety



Disasters



Loss

After the fires, I remember realizing that most of the places I grew up going to had burnt in the fires. Finding out most of those places had burnt down was hard to deal with. Those were really important spots to me. I wanted to share those with people I know, and my own family, when I get older.

*-Youth from Southern Oregon
-www.Oregonlive.com*



Fear

It's always been smoky here in the summers, but the smell of it is really scary now. The night before the fire, the wind was howling. The wind always startles me now.



-High school student, Medford



Heat dome

Going through those climate disasters, it definitely takes a toll on someone. After taking a walk on (that) day, I remember crying in my kitchen because I knew we were going to have to go through that again and other people are going to have to go through that again. Right now, it doesn't feel like it is going to be OK.

-High school student from Portland
-www.pamplinmedia.com, 6/14/2022



Environmental Degradation

The image shows a dense urban skyline with numerous high-rise buildings. The lower portion of the city is shrouded in a thick, greyish-white haze or smog, which obscures the details of the buildings and the ground. The sky above is filled with dark, heavy clouds, suggesting a gloomy and polluted atmosphere. The overall color palette is muted, dominated by greys, blues, and browns, which emphasizes the theme of environmental degradation.

Loss of cultural practices, identity



In my mother's generation, when she was growing up, she would go to traditional ceremonies and have smoked salmon that was fished traditionally by our people on our river which we have fished at since time immemorial. In my lifetime, eating that fish, seeing that smoked salmon in our ceremonies, is scarce. This is a full spiritual, emotional and physical embodiment of how I am stressed out by this and how this impacts me.

Indigenous student from So. Oregon OHA
Press Conference, June 14, 2022



Livelihood and Culture

The number one thing that we try to protect is our hunting, fishing and gathering rights. You can't fish the fish that we used to or we can't gather the things that we used to because they no longer grow here. That affects our livelihood, or even if it's not our livelihood anymore, our connection to our ancestors, our connection to our culture, our traditions. I think that that's one of the things that could be affecting our mental health and our physical health

-Focus group participant



Youth Climate Anxiety



Youth are feeling...

Fear, anger, grief, powerlessness, hopelessness

Frustration and anger that not more is being done

Feeling dismissed by adults, feeling alone

Sense of unjust burden and responsibility

Climate impacts on top of structural and historical violence

It's a constant thing...

It's like a constant thing. And it affects all things and includes the wildfires on top of the settlers on top of their violence. And then thinking more broadly and globally, because I'm also indigenous to the islands of Tonga, a lot of our people are climate refugees and are no longer able to return home to the islands because it's sinking and cemeteries are underwater. And that's also settler induced climate change... I feel like climate change cannot be talked about without talking about settler colonialism, white supremacy and, like, genocide..

Focus group participant



Why plan our future?



My friend started talking, like...why even have kids why plan our future that far ahead? ...we could be bringing someone into a world where they might not have that long to live or be able to breathe clean air, swim in clean water...

Focus group participant



Sense of pressure



I remember growing up hearing you can fix the world, and your generation is going to be the one to fix it...and somehow they saw it as empowering like, you guys, you got this, you can do this. But like, I just grew up with that pressure and yeah we have to do it, but it's not really a decision that we got to make.

Focus group participant



Yelling at the wall

They've already lived their futures if that makes sense. But I still don't know what mine's gonna look like because of this existential threat. And so, it's like yelling at the wall about, like, this really scary thing, but not really hearing anything back.

Focus group participant





Themes of Resilience & Hope



Building community



Spaces to share climate distress
and hopes



Organizing for change and
solutions



Celebrating cultural identity



Strengthening our relationship
with nature, with the land

Future directions

Youth-Adult partnerships: We are in this together

Healing-centered engagement: cultivating connection, culture, and hope as we work toward social change

Cross-sectoral collaborations and integration: education, mental health, natural resources, public health

A good starting point for the adults around me, the parents around me, the teachers around me, the educators around me is to have intergenerational conversations about the climate crisis.

Te Maia Wiki, Indigenous high school student, Ashland



Voice actors

Eliza Garcia

Elliott Moon

Grace Doelshal

Kim Tham

Pradnya Garud

Lev Schneider

Wes Rivers

Questions?

Contact:

Julie.Sifuentes@dhsoha.state.or.us