

## **New State Scorecards Expose Climate and Health Risks**

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The Commonwealth Fund's [new scorecards](#) unmask wide variation across states when it comes to carbon emissions contributions and climate health vulnerabilities. Reporting on these differences can spotlight both accountability (why some states lag) and opportunity (what policies are working).

The scorecards summarize indicators on air quality, extreme heat, natural hazards, flood risks, energy efficiency, health impacts of electricity emissions, greenhouse gas emissions from the health sector and commuting emissions from health care workers. Thus, performing well on these indicators reflects not only health vulnerabilities to climate risks but also impacts from the health sector on the environment.

### **More about the report**

The new report says, “We selected the indicators in part because they represent risks that can be mitigated through policy change at the local, state, or federal level or through proactive measures taken by health care systems.” That means that journalists can use these score cards to highlight policies that are needed or that are successful in their coverage regions.

Many of the scores are not complete surprises — for example, we tend to know which states are more vulnerable to floods or extreme heat. But the combination of data and the scorecard for each state contains important pointers for journalists.

How a state compares with other states with similar challenges can reveal much about its clever solutions and needs for improvement. For example, Cris Villalong-Vivoni [reported](#) in Connecticut Insider the state's scorecard performance with this lens, pointing out that the state's performance lagged behind all its neighbors in the Northeast and why.

### **Story ideas**

Here are some potential stories to consider:

- Find out how states are integrating health outcomes into climate adaptation plans. Which hospitals sit in flood zones or wildfire corridors?
- Investigate what is being done (or not) to harden health systems in vulnerable counties.
- The report card ends with policy recommendations, categorized as federal, state and local, or health care systems. The geographic data and these policy recommendations can guide reporting. For example, a journalist could pick a region in their coverage area with serious heat risk and low health performance, mapping mortality or hospital visits on high-heat days.

**Take-home points from the new scorecards:**

- The lowest ranked states are all in the South: West Virginia (51st), Kentucky (50th), Louisiana (49th), Florida (48th) and Mississippi (47th)
- The top ranked states are all in the Northeast and Northwest: Vermont (1st), New York (2nd), Washington (3rd), New Jersey (4th) and Maine (5th)
- Southwestern states, particularly Arizona, designated as poorer air quality areas.
- Southwestern states, particularly Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and Texas, are more vulnerable to extreme heat.
- Florida and South Dakota stand out for the risks that natural hazards pose to their health care facilities.
- Most of the country is doing pretty poorly on promoting clean, efficient energy, but California and Massachusetts are leaders in the transition.
- Hawai'i stands out as contributing high electricity emissions while also suffering disproportionately high health harms from climate change. Kentucky and West Virginia follow close behind.
- Health care institutions in West Virginia, Wyoming, North Dakota and Kentucky emit the most greenhouse gases, per capita.
- Gulf States have the highest percentage of inpatient facility beds in hazardous flood zones—with Florida in the lead at 15%. Louisiana and Mississippi also stand out with about 1 out of every 10 hospital beds in such zones.
- Southern states plus Hawai'i have disproportionately high emissions from health care workers' commutes, with South Carolina, Mississippi and Alabama being the worst.