

Student Chapter of Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate

Amelda Klink, a 4th year Pharm.D. student, is President of the new student chapter of Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate – a nonprofit established in 2018 that strives to increase awareness about climate change and the associated issues that threaten the health of patients, wildlife, and communities in Montana.

Last semester, Klink enrolled in the inaugural Human Health and Climate Change course offered as an interprofessional education (IPE) elective, led by Professors Hayley Blackburn, Peter McDonough, and Jennifer Robohm. The course consisted of lectures from both interdisciplinary faculty members and a variety of guest speakers from all over Montana, including physicians, nurses, infectious disease experts, economists, and tribal community experts. There was even a guest lecturer from Indonesia who spoke about planetary health. Students explored collaborating across many disciplines to improve health outcomes in relation to climate change.

In a [short video on wildfire, health and climate created by Montana Professionals for a Healthy Climate](#), Dr. Beth Schenk makes the point that environmental issues are health issues.

“This has been driven home by the fires over the past 5 or 6 years and by the reality that we live with smoke in the summer now. This is a big deal, so looking at how we make decisions using an environmental justice lens is important,” Schenk said.

For Klink, it took a lot of weight off her shoulders to have open, honest discussions about a subject both challenging and politically divisive.

“While climate change is difficult to confront at times, it was amazing to walk away from class feeling like I had the tools to make a difference as I move forward in my career as a health professional,” said Klink. “I hope more students take classes like this one.”

Klink joined with her classmate Chelsea Kuiper, a Ph.D. student in the School of Public and Community Health Sciences, to form the first **Student Chapter of Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate** here at UM. The group is currently in the recruitment phase and will be holding an **introductory meeting on Tuesday, September 14, 6 – 7 pm in Skaggs 169** for undergraduate and graduate students in the public and environmental health sciences and health or pre-health professions (nursing, medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy, veterinary, and alternative health fields).

“We hope to do one significant action every semester,” said Klink. “We’ll choose projects based on suggestions from group members. We’ve already started on our first project, but it’s still in its early phase.”

Klink and Kuiper have made the decision to team up with Climate Smart Missoula, a regional climate planning, action, and resilience organization that has secured a donation of 60 standalone air purifiers to be donated to community members in need. The student chapter of Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate is working with a local health care organization to identify people who may be more vulnerable to the devastating effects of wildfire smoke due to chronic lung conditions or other social determinants of health. Group members will then distribute and set up the air purifiers.

Klink is currently writing an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application so the group can collect data on this project. She hopes that by quantifying any health-improving benefits, the project can be sustained through grant funding. Klink hopes to be able to provide replacement filters for the units on an annual basis.

If you have questions or would like more information about the Student Chapter of Montana Health Professional for a Healthy Climate, be sure to reach out to Amelda Klink (President) at amelda.klink@umconnect.edu or Chelsea Kuiper (Vice President) at chelsea.kuiper@umconnect.umt.edu. Students interested in enrolling in the interprofessional course on human health and climate change in spring 2022, or exploring other learning opportunities around these topics can reach out to Professor Hayley Blackburn at hayley.blackburn@umontana.edu.