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Centering Health Equity in Climate Action

A Toolkit for Businesses

Contents

Introduction

Centering Health Equity in Climate Action (CHEC) is a cross-sector, cross-industry initiative created to ensure health and health equity are core components of climate action.

Our vision is a world in which **all** people and the planet thrive, no longer suffering from the consequences of climate change. A world in which the health of people and the health of the planet are restored to their natural, harmonious balance.

We know achieving truly transformative change demands **collective** efforts from all stakeholders, including the businesses driving innovation, the public sector governing our world, and the individuals and communities who make up our society.

Out of this realization, CHEC was born. Our mission is to ensure both the public and private sector prioritize addressing the negative impacts of climate change on all people's health.

While the climate and health nexus has been increasingly recognized in the last decade, there is a third consideration that often gets left out of the picture: **equity**. CHEC recognizes climate change, and its health impacts, are not equally distributed and communities which have been historically under-resourced are more likely to suffer from the impacts of climate change.

CHEC aims to **center equity**, ensuring those who are **most affected** by climate change are at the **center of climate action and are equipped with the resources, tools, and support they need to ensure a resilient and thriving future.**

To implement our mission, CHEC brought together partners with ambitious goals and visions: leading businesses, academics, and community-based organizations. The aim of CHEC is to co-create approaches to address challenges at the health equity and climate nexus.

This Toolkit is our first step. CHEC leaders authored this Toolkit to inspire and provide tools for other businesses to begin their climate and health equity journey.

This Toolkit does not prescribe a single way to tackle the climate and health equity nexus. **We know a one size fits all solution doesn't exist, and most importantly, doesn't work.** This Toolkit is meant to provide considerations, approaches, and examples for businesses to take as inspiration, learn from, and adapt to best suit their own circumstances.

What is the climate/health nexus and why does it matter?

Climate change poses an imminent threat to our businesses, communities, and health. According to the World Economic Forum, by 2050, climate change will cost **$12.5 trillion** in economic losses and an additional **$1.1 trillion** in healthcare costs.[1] The burning of fossil fuels along with industrialization, deforestation, urbanization, and unsustainable agricultural practices has resulted in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere at rates about **50% higher** than pre-industrial levels.[2] The IPCC's latest report on planetary boundaries states:

Climate change does not impact all people's health equally. Vulnerable community members live in areas often hit hardest by extreme weather, do not have adequate resources to rebuild after climate disasters, and experience chronic illnesses and other health complications due to a lack of medical care and social and economic inequities. Individuals in these communities are already suffering from health inequities due to a legacy of historical biases compounded by socioeconomic factors and they are the ones who are most affected by climate change's impact on health.

"The physical impacts of warming include, but are not limited to, modified extreme events like torrential rainfall, floods, heatwaves, and droughts… and can lead to health impacts on human organs, food insecurity, and climate migration."[3-7] These impacts are only expected to get worse. Between 2030 and 2050, "…climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year, from undernutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress alone."[8]

In 2021, US EPA released a report titled, "Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States," quantifying the overlap of social and climate vulnerability, as outlined here:

Minority communities are considerably more likely to be impacted by:

→ **MORTALITY RATES**

→ **ASTHMA DIAGNOSES**

→ **LABOR HOUR LOSSES**

→ **SEA LEVEL RISE**

→ **FLOODING**

→ **BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN INDIVIDUALS ARE 40% MORE LIKELY** to currently live in areas with the highest projected increases in mortality rates due to climate-driven changes in extreme temperatures.

→ **BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN INDIVIDUALS ARE 34% MORE LIKELY** to live in areas with the highest projected increases in childhood asthma diagnoses due to climate-driven changes, in particular air pollution.

→ **HISPANIC AND LATINO INDIVIDUALS ARE 43% MORE LIKELY** to currently live in areas with the highest projected labor hour losses in weather-exposed industries due to climate-driven increases in high-temperature days.

→ **AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE INDIVIDUALS ARE 48% MORE LIKELY** to currently live in areas where the highest percentage of land is projected to be inundated due to sea level rise.

→ **ASIAN INDIVIDUALS ARE 23% MORE LIKELY** to currently live in coastal areas with the highest projected increases in traffic delays from climate-driven changes in high-tide flooding.[9]

The following examples are a small selection of real-life implications impacts from climate change have on health equity today.

→ HURRICANES

Climate change intensifies natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes, leading to mental and physical health issues, including injuries, depression, chronic disease emergencies, hygiene decline, and food shortages. Vulnerable communities face greater risks due to less resilient infrastructure, increasing their susceptibility to disease. Damaged healthcare facilities further amplify these risks, especially for those with preexisting conditions. For instance, Hurricane Maria caused an IV bag shortage after disrupting factories in Puerto Rico, impacting cardiology patients reliant on IV-delivered medication.[11]

→ VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

Climate change substantially affects pathogens (parasites, viruses and bacteria), vectors, and reservoir hosts, with implications for the transmission of many vector-borne diseases.[12] Increasing global temperatures have expanded the geographical area where certain vectors can survive and the length of (warmer) seasons when they are active, potentially leading to increased epidemics or pandemics. Vulnerable populations experience heightened impacts from vector-borne disease. Take the COVID-19 pandemic as an example. BIPOC front line workers, who remained in the necessary economy during the national shutdown and were required to attend in-person work, were more exposed to COVID-19 and had less access to paid sick leave, childcare, job security, and healthcare benefits. BIPOC communities, even those who were not front-line workers, also experienced higher levels of negative health outcomes and deaths from COVID-19 due to social determinants of health.[13]

→ AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution from fossil fuels is responsible for killing one in five people worldwide.[10] For communities of color, air pollution exposure is higher at every income level and access to screening services for lung cancer is lower. While several factors contribute to this, these impacts can be traced to the 1930s Homeowners Loan Corporation which graded neighborhoods on a four-point scale: most desirable, still desirable, definitely declining, and hazardous. Neighborhoods with Black and immigrant populations and known environmental pollution sources received the lowest grades. Hazardous industries, including fossil fuels, were placed in lower grade neighborhoods. As a result, these communities, still primarily Black, Latin, and Asian American, continue to experience higher rates of air pollution, and their health suffers accordingly. To this day, in San Francisco, communities of color experience double the level of asthma rates compared to neighboring, predominantly white, communities.

Environmental impacts of climate change

→ **RISING TEMPERATURES**

→ **INCREASING GHG LEVELS**

→ **RISING SEA LEVELS**

→ **MORE EXTREME WEATHER**

Addressing climate change without considering health equity exacerbates inequity and public and environmental health, both of which are critical for businesses to thrive. Now is the moment to go beyond decarbonization and ensure businesses equitably protect public health.

→ **SOURCE: Adapted from CDC, J. Patz**

Impacts of climate change on human health

→ **AIR POLLUTION & INCREASING ALLERGENS**

Asthma, alleries, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases

→ **EXTREME HEAT**

Heat-related illnesses, death, cardiovascular failure

→ **DROUGHT**

Valley fever, dust storms, water supply impacts

→ **ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION**

Forced migration, loss of jobs and income, civil conflict

→ **CHANGES IN VECTOR ECOLOGY**

Lyme Disease, West Nile Virus, Hantavirus, Malaria, Encephalitis

→ **DEGRADED LIVING CONDITIONS & SOCIAL INEQUITIES**

Exacerbation of racial and health inequities and vulnerabilities, loss of employment

→ **WILDFIRES & SMOKE**

Injuries, fatalities, loss of homes, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases

→ **FOOD SYSTEM IMPACTS**

Food insecurity, higher food prices, foodborne illness, malnuitrition

→ **SEVERE WEATHER & FLOODS**

Injuries, fatalities, loss of homes, indoor fungi and mold

→ **WATER QUALITY IMPACTS**

Harmful algal blooms, crytosporidiosis, campylobacteriosis, leptospirosis

→ **MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS**

Stress, anxiety, depression, sense of loss, post-traumatic stress disorder, strains on social relationships

How does climate and health equity impact business?

Health equity refers to the fair and just opportunity for everyone to attain their full health potential. It means addressing barriers to accessing health services, such as unequal distribution of resources, economic inequality, and structural racism.

Achieving health equity requires acknowledging and dismantling the inequities within the social determinants of health—the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes such as housing, education, income, and environment. By centering health equity, businesses can help ensure those who have been historically marginalized are given a seat at the table and are involved in the solutions which will directly impact their health, environment, and economic opportunities.

It is easy for businesses to overlook health equity when implementing well-intentioned climate and health initiatives.

CONSIDER THIS:

◆ Perhaps your business is investing in or considering procuring renewable energy. Historically, in the process of clearing land, communities have been left out of decision-making or displaced, often without adequate compensation, consultation, or consideration of their lived experiences and expertise and without benefitting from the project.

◆ Perhaps your business is implementing green initiatives as a part of its decarbonization strategy. Green initiatives often have positive health benefits, such as reducing heat and pollution, promoting physical and mental health, and decreasing respiratory diseases in communities historically affected by industrial pollution. Businesses may invest in these activities and miss acknowledging, understanding, and measuring the health co-benefits.

When businesses integrate health equity into climate action, they create co-benefits which strengthen community resilience, reduce healthcare costs, and promote a healthier and more prosperous society.

Climate impacts have always challenged the business operating environment, as physical impacts disrupt business operations and affect the people who play a vital role in business continuity.

CONSIDER:

◆ In 2020, **over 295 billion working hours** were forfeited due to heat waves.[14]

◆ By 2030, heat stress is projected to **reduce working hours by 2.2%** and GDP by $2.4 billion globally.[15]

◆ Over **60% of workers** insured through their employer have a chronic health condition that is susceptible to extreme heat and air pollution.

HOWEVER, FOR BUSINESSES WHO ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACT ON THIS NEXUS, RESULTS ARE PROMISING, AS:

◆ For every dollar saved on direct healthcare costs, businesses and their employees get a return of **$2.30 in greater productivity and performance.**[16]

◆ Businesses who invest in workforce health perform **2% above the S&P 500 annually.**[17]

"Even the healthcare industry, which should be the last standing in a climate disaster or emergency, is not as resilient as it should be. Businesses are fragile and are only as resilient as the people within them."

SEEMA WADHWA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP, KAISER PERMANENTE

"There is a misconception that climate and health is a healthcare issue, but health impacts every sector. For example, when we speak to the healthcare providers that work in community health centers, the patients being impacted by extreme heat are often agricultural and construction workers who are showing up with heat stroke and heat stress. Those of us in healthcare are seeing it first, but every sector will be impacted – and the truth is they already are."

PHIL DAHLIN, GLOBAL DIRECTOR OF SUSTAINABILITY, JOHNSON & JOHNSON

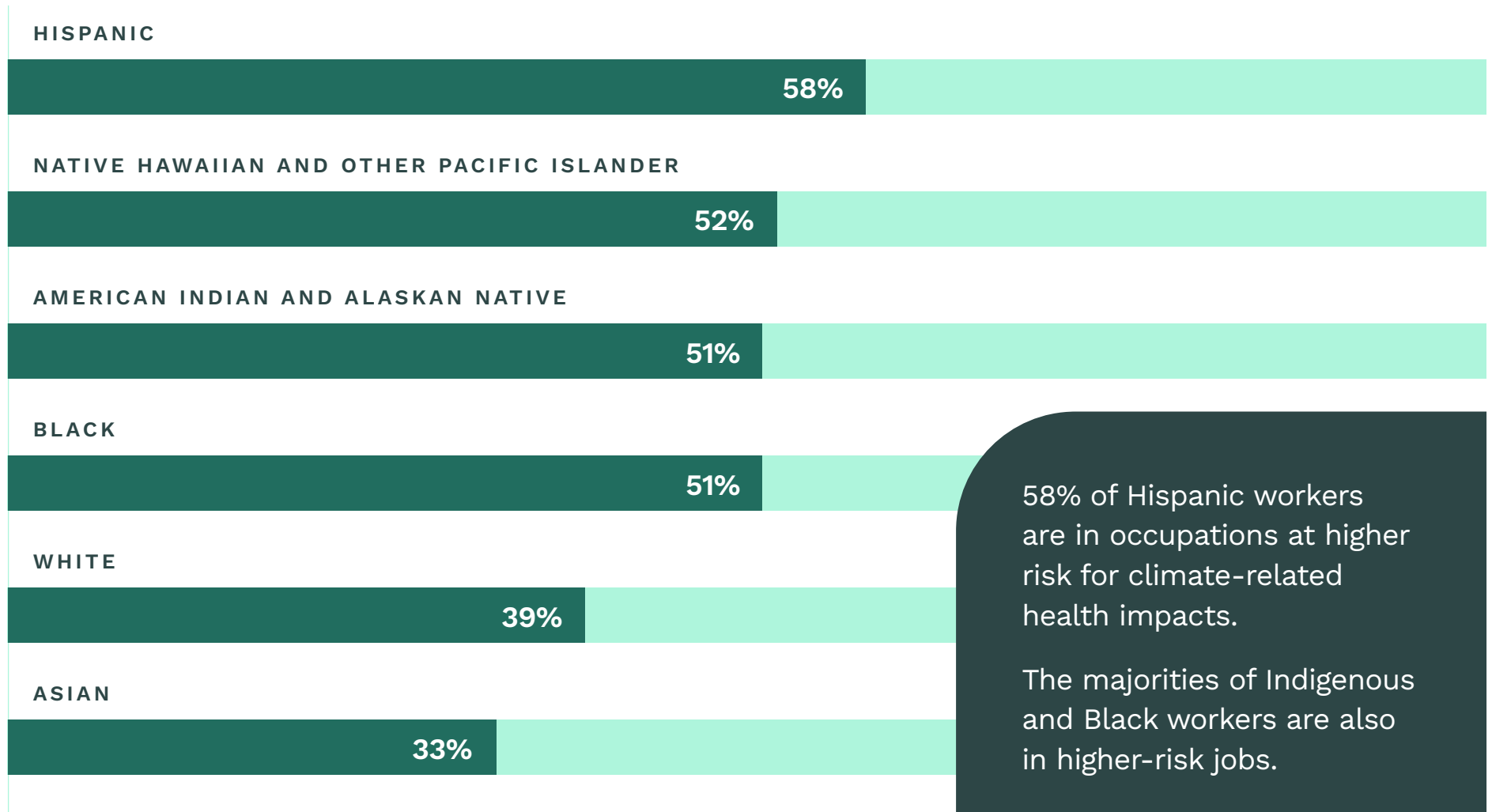# Climate events and their health and business impacts

CLIMATE EVENT	KEY HEALTH IMPACTS		RESULTING BUSINESS IMPACTS
EXTREME HEAT	◆ Dehydration ◆ Heat stroke ◆ Aggravated cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses	◆ Mental health distress ◆ Chronic disease complications ◆ Workplace injuries	◆ Decreased productivity ◆ Increased healthcare costs ◆ Increased disability costs ◆ Increased workers' compensation claims
POOR AIR QUALITY	◆ Respiratory conditions ◆ Cardiovascular challenges ◆ Eye irritation and vision problems ◆ Exacerbation of chronic health conditions	◆ Cognitive impairment ◆ Mental health effects ◆ Skin conditions ◆ Pregnancy complications	◆ Employee absenteeism ◆ Turnover and retention issues ◆ Reduced morale and job satisfaction ◆ Increased safety risks
UNPRECEDENTED STORMS	◆ Physical injuries ◆ Mental health trauma ◆ Waterborne diseases ◆ Respiratory problems ◆ Destruction of food systems and nutritional deficiencies	◆ Disruption of mental services ◆ Destruction of housing ◆ Disruption of transportation systems ◆ Exposure to chemicals and toxins	◆ Regulatory and compliance risks ◆ Lack of talent available in certain areas as a result of climate displacement or migration ◆ Supply chain disruption ◆ Reduced income ◆ Unexpected forced closures
VECTOR-BORNE ILLNESSES	◆ Lyme Disease ◆ West Nile Virus	◆ Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever ◆ Eastern Equine Encephalitis	

Percentage of workers at higher risk for climate-health impacts

HISPANIC

58%

NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER

52%

AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKAN NATIVE

51%

BLACK

51%

WHITE

39%

ASIAN

33%

58% of Hispanic workers are in occupations at higher risk for climate-related health impacts.

The majorities of Indigenous and Black workers are also in higher-risk jobs.

Integrating health equity into business action:

Recommendations for businesses to get started

While we recognize addressing climate change and health equity impacts will look different for every business, we recommend starting with the following steps.

STEP ONE

Understand the business' climate and health equity impacts

STEP TWO

Start with the most impacted in your value chain

STEP THREE

Measure, manage, and monitor

STEP FOUR

Embed climate and health equity throughout your organization

Understand the business' climate and health equity impacts

Change is only possible when you have a clear understanding of what needs to be changed.

Begin with a thorough assessment to identify:

→ **YOUR BUSINESS' GREENHOUSE EMISSIONS AND OTHER CLIMATE AND NATURE IMPACTS**

→ **HOW THE ABOVE MAY AFFECT PUBLIC HEALTH AND WHERE ALONG YOUR VALUE CHAIN THIS OCCURS**

→ **ANY INEQUITABLE EFFECTS ON SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

Identify where your company's operations most significantly impact the environment and, in turn, people's well-being. Prioritize the climate and health equity issues that are most important to your business and stakeholders.
This is a significant undertaking, and businesses can rarely accomplish this alone. Collaborate with peer companies, NGOs, nonprofits, academics, and communities to understand key areas for action.

CASE STUDY

Addressing heat stress through community clinics

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) is an American multinational pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical technology company guided by its credo to put the needs and well-being of the people it serves first. As a leader in healthcare, J&J realized climate change is negatively impacting public health. At the same time, clinics sometimes face difficulty performing to their full potential due to funding constraints. J&J wanted to start investments into community resilience to improve healthcare access, though it didn't know where to start.

Through partnerships with Harvard Chan C-CHANGE, Americares, National Association of Community Health Networks (NAC), and the National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (NAFC), J&J overlayed social and climate vulnerability data to identify hotspots along its value chain, then developed a needs assessment survey and distributed it to 300 safety net clinic health providers across the country. Approximately 90% reported extreme heat as a key risk for improving health outcomes and three-quarters underscored a desire to know more about climate impacts on health.

Utilizing partner networks, J&J was able to identify communities most impacted and developed the Climate Health Equity for Community Clinics program. The program reduces inequitable health impacts from heat via capacity building and codifying evidence-based treatments. For example, understanding when precautions are necessary, connecting patients to home air conditioning, and closing the loop with organizations that already conduct wellness home visits. The partners also published learnings in the **Climate Resilience for Frontline Clinics Toolkit** to scale impact. This Toolkit provides healthcare professionals and patients with the top five evidence-based tools available to mitigate the health impacts of climate-related extreme heat.

Key takeaways for business:

IDENTIFY INTERSECTIONS

Use data to understand where social and climate vulnerability intersect and prioritize the most vulnerable populations to support.

UTILIZE NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS

Find trustworthy and credible partners relevant to your value chain to help identify and maximize positive impacts to stakeholders.

LISTEN ACTIVELY

Prioritize active listening to meaningfully build relationships, engage authentically, and implement impactful solutions.

Learn more

→ **Climate Resilient Health Clinics**

→ **Health Equity Programs**

CASE STUDY

Utilizing data to connect communities with health resources

Kaiser Permanente is one of the nation's largest non-profit health plans and is unique for its integrated care and coverage model and commitment to value-based care. Keeping communities healthy is core to Kaiser Permanente's mission and approach. To determine how to best address the biggest factors that shape people's health, every three years the organization conducts a community health needs assessment (CHNA). The CHNA evaluates environmental and climate-related conditions, among other social determinants of health.

The assessment analyzes eight core factors to understand risks and environmental impacts on health at the zip-code level. These factors include fine particulate matter in the air, costal flood risk, drought risk, heat wave risk, respiratory hazard, river flooding risk, road network density, and tree canopy cover. Kaiser Permanente also uses the Health and Human Services Office of Climate Change Environmental Justice tool for additional climate and health data.

As a result, Kaiser Permanente has developed initiatives such as **Love my Air Denver** to reduce air pollution by placing air quality sensors in federally qualified schools and health centers. Now, Kaiser Permanente is working with communities to find solutions for those disproportionately affected and impacted by air pollution, such as those living in areas with reduced canopy or with asthma.

Key takeaways for business:

DIVE INTO DATA

Use open-source data and tools from experts to understand climate and health impacts affecting stakeholders in their value chain and efficiently go from intention to action. Data, however, is just one piece of the puzzle. Conversations, interviews, and community forums also highlight specific stakeholder needs and promote co-creation.

SHARE FINDINGS WITH PEERS

Health equity is not competitive, but collaborative. Share findings and resources with peers, suppliers, customers, and stakeholders to amplify positive impacts.

Learn more

→ **Kaiser Air Quality Programs**

→ **HHS Environmental Justice Index**

→ **Community Health Needs Dashboard**

Start with the most impacted in your value chain

Identify the populations most affected by climate and health equity impacts within your value chain, as these are the groups for which your business holds the greatest responsibility.

Affected stakeholders are individuals, groups, or communities that are directly or indirectly impacted by a business's operations, decisions, or policies. These stakeholders include customers, employees, investors, residents, small businesses, and marginalized groups whose social, environmental, or economic well-being may be influenced by the business's activities.

Businesses should engage affected stakeholders to fulfill their responsibility toward those impacted by their operations, and build trust, enhance their reputation, proactively prevent conflict, and create shared value.

Consider the following categories when identifying
your business' affected stakeholders:

CATEGORY	UPSTREAM	OPERATIONS	DOWNSTREAM	CONSIDER
GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY	Areas where materials are sourced and supplied. *Ex: Tier 1+ suppliers, supply chain workforce, communities near extraction sites*	Areas where products/ services are manufactured, transported, and sold. *Ex: Communities near factories, warehouses, distribution centers or operations workforce*	Areas where materials or products are disposed. *Ex: Communities living near waste sites, waste management workforce*	Type of activities conducted in each geographic region may have varying climate and health impacts. For example, a business may have a significant number of retail locations in city A but just one waste disposal site in city B. However, communities in city B may still experience more negative climate/health impacts than those in city A.
PRODUCT & INDUSTRY CONSIDERATIONS	What health or climate issues are salient in your supply chain? *Ex: GHG emissions footprint, air pollution*	What climate / health issue is salient in your operations? *Ex: Workforce healthcare access, heat exposure*	What climate/health issues are salient downstream of your operations? *Ex: Water use from waste disposal, plastic pollution*	What is your industry's legacy effect on climate/health? Prioritize working with communities historically affected by your industry. For example, a manufacturing company may prioritize working with communities impacted by pollution or waste. A food, beverage, and agriculture company may prioritize working with communities impacted by heat stress. A technology company may prioritize working with communities impacted by water scarcity.

Consider the following categories when identifying
your business' affected stakeholders:

CATEGORY	UPSTREAM	OPERATIONS	DOWNSTREAM	CONSIDER
EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS	What partnerships exist in the supply chain? Ex: Suppliers, labor rights organizations, farmer/producer associations	To what groups does your business belong? Ex: Employee resource groups, worker unions, hourly employees, frontline employees	With what groups are your downstream partners involved? Ex: Customers, community/NGO organizations, vendors, retailers	What groups may have already expressed concerns regarding your business impacts to their health and communities? What are their concerns? What community groups are already working on climate and health issues material for your business? Listen and collaborate to align their priorities with your business' action. Which of your company's existing activities could be improved to ensure resiliency against climate/health? For example: ◆ What existing healthcare offerings may be inequitable? ◆ What additional benefits may employees need to protect themselves from climate and health impacts? ◆ What impacts on the social determinants of health are within your business' control and can be improved? Be careful not to overburden stakeholders. Rather, invite them to participate and support within their capacity and provide additional incentives and compensation for participation.

CASE STUDY

Delicious and equitable meals: utilizing plant-based menus to improve climate and health equity outcomes

Sodexo is a global food services company that works to create a better day for everyone and build a better life for all. For Sodexo, a company that serves patients, healthcare providers, and administrators in hospitals across the world, coming up with culturally relevant, climate-conscious, and delicious meals is no small feat. In New York City alone, this meant coming up with a menu for a hospital system in over 10 different neighborhoods.

Sodexo turned inward, rallying its employees, employee resource groups, and customers (hospital patients) to co-develop menus unique to each of the diverse communities in New York served by this hospital system. Sodexo engaged in a deep process, developing relationships with chef employees and customer patients to survey and test menus together, resulting in:

◆ Sodexo's patient menu at this New York City hospital system now includes plant-based, culturally relevant options such as veggie goulash and black bean and roasted corn burritos.

◆ Plant-based eating lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, certain cancers, high cholesterol, and increases vitamin and fiber intake.

◆ Patients who ate plant-based meals at those hospitals reported a satisfaction rate of over 90%.

◆ The plant-based meals led to a reduction in carbon emissions of 36% and a cost savings of $0.59 per meal.

◆ Patients who are discharged from the hospital receive a booklet of plant-based recipes to make at home to continue their care journey beyond the hospital walls.

◆ Creation of the Better Tomorrow Community of Practice: a group focused on peer-to-peer employee conversations on the impact of food to climate and health.

Key takeaways for business:

START WITH YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

Impacts on stakeholders should be at the front of corporate initiatives. Thoughtfully and frequently engage your frontline workers and communities across the value chain.

UPLIFT YOUR COMPANY'S UNIQUENESS

Lean into the unique strengths of your organization and needs of your stakeholders. Consider how your business is best suited to affect change for those in your value chain that need it most.

Learn more

→ **Sodexo Sustainable Eating**

→ **Sodexo Plant-Based Eating**

Once you identify affected stakeholders, build relationships.

Understand historical impacts such as displacement, pollution, exploitation, or silencing. Openly acknowledge harm and commit to remedy. Consider restorative justice, such as funding community infrastructure, scholarships, health initiatives, or job creation programs that directly address harm.

Businesses can center stakeholder needs and voices by:

1. UPLIFTING STAKEHOLDER-LED SOLUTIONS

◆ Ensure efforts are driven by stakeholder needs, rather than corporate interests.

◆ Advocate for policies to enhance stakeholder decision-making, economic development, labor rights, and environmental justice.

2. ESTABLISHING EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

◆ View your business as a partner supporting stakeholder-driven development.

◆ Share decision-making power by adopting models of participatory governance, for instance, community advisory boards.

3. INVESTING IN STAKEHOLDER EXPERTISE

◆ Invest in those who have deep knowledge of local challenges. Hire local consultants, community advocates, or environmental experts who understand the region's unique dynamics.

◆ Support local grassroots organizations and advocacy groups to speak on their own behalf. Examples include funding community media outlets, public forums, or advocacy campaigns.

Businesses can build long-term, trusted relationships by:

1. INVESTING IN CONSISTENCY AND COMMITMENT

◆ Trust is built over time. Demonstrate long-term commitment through consistent and authentic engagement, willingness to co-create solutions, sustained investment, and follow-through on promises. One-time donations or short-term projects are insufficient.

◆ Consider developing a stakeholder benefits agreement to ensure both parties are aligned on the partnership benefits.

2. COMMUNICATING TRANSPARENTLY

◆ Open, regular, and honest communication is vital. Provide accessible stakeholder impact reports, ensure decision-making processes, goals, and practices are transparent, be open to scrutiny, and hold your business accountable to stakeholders.

◆ Engage stakeholders early and often to understand their concerns, needs, and priorities through town halls, surveys, and listening sessions.

3. RESPECTING LOCAL CULTURE

◆ Take the time to learn about community traditions and integrate this knowledge into interactions and policies.

4. BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

◆ Invest in local leadership and skill building by funding leadership development programs, vocational training, and capacity-building workshops to empower stakeholders to advocate for themselves and their health.

◆ Help stakeholders access funding, technology, and networks that increase their capacity to address challenges and build sustainable projects. This might include providing micro-grants, scholarships, legal support, or business mentorship.

Each stakeholder community is unique, so avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

Solutions and initiatives should be tailored to the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities within each stakeholder group.

CASE STUDY

Bringing youth to the climate and health equity nexus

The Center for Climate Health and the Global Environment in the **Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (Harvard Chan C-CHANGE)** aims to translate innovative climate science from across Harvard to increase public awareness of the health impacts of climate change.

Harvard Chan C-CHANGE recognized Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are chronically underrepresented in the healthcare sector, especially in departments of environmental health, leading to worsened health outcomes in BIPOC communities Research shows a 10% increase in the representation of Black primary care physicians is associated with 30.6 days of greater life expectancy among Black people in that community.

Capitalizing on this research, Harvard Chan C-CHANGE empowers students to pursue careers in climate and health and spark community solutions. In partnership with Putney Student Travel, the Harvard Chan C-CHANGE **Youth Summit on Climate, Equity, and Health** was developed to teach high school students to be climate and health leaders in their communities. Every summer the summit brings 100 motivated high school students to Harvard for a week-long residential intensive program where they learn about the intersectional challenges of climate change and the actions needed to take to protect themselves now and into the future. During the program, students engage with a wide range of climate leaders, from policymakers, advocates, and scientists to healthcare providers, entrepreneurs, and their peers. Students in this program have gone on to run for office, organize youth climate conferences, and write to their local newspapers.

Key takeaways for business:

BRING THOSE MOST IMPACTED TO THE TABLE

Those most affected are often the most motivated and knowledgeable when it comes to developing effective solutions. Elevate these voices and include them in decision-making.

INVEST IN CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Academic institutions like Harvard Chan C-CHANGE regularly support initiatives at the climate and health nexus. Supporting existing initiatives, via investment or partnership, to amplify impact.

Learn more

→ **Harvard Chan C-CHANGE Youth Summits**

What can I do to start connecting with community-based organizations?

→ **SOURCE LOCAL**

Involve locals at every stage of the value chain, from production to disposal.

→ **ENSURE ACTIONS ARE ETHICAL**

Include communities in regular audits across the value chain.

→ **REMEDIATE PAST HARM**

Acknowledge past harms publicly and remediate historic injustices, for instance, though cleanups, water treatment, or nature-based solutions.

→ **PROMOTE HEALTH ACCESS**

Promote a safety culture, reduce pollution across the value chain, invest in local capacity building, and fund local health initiatives, for instance, through complimentary health screenings.

CASE STUDY

Centering climate and health equity in patient care plans

Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) is an Atlanta-based NGO dedicated to advancing racial equity and shared prosperity in the American South by creating opportunities for energy equity, health equity, and economic inclusion.

PSE recognized healthcare institutions in Atlanta lacked the necessary information and frameworks to address the environmental and social determinants of health affecting local communities. In response, they partnered directly with healthcare professionals to improve patient outcomes and reduce environmental impacts via:

- **Preventive Practices:** Integration of climate-related social determinants of health into patient care plans to prevent chronic diseases and proactively mitigate environmental health risks.

- **Resource Mapping:** Development of referral networks and informational tools to provide access to local environmental and health resources.

- **Institutional Leadership:** Assessment of existing roles to understand where additional sustainability functions may be needed.

As a result, healthcare professionals were equipped with strategies to advance climate and health equity in their daily practices with patients, resulting in a more inclusive healthcare system and improved health outcomes for both people and the planet.

Key takeaways for business:

COLLABORATE LOCALLY

Partnering with local nonprofits is mutually beneficial nonprofits bring deep insights into community needs, and businesses gain expert partners to co-design impactful, effective solutions.

INVEST IN EMPLOYEE TRAINING

Build internal teams' capacity to address climate and health with an equity-first mindset.

EMPOWER EQUITY-FOCUSED LEADERS

Appoint leaders who reflect the communities impacted by business operations and who are dedicated to advancing environmental and social justice.

Learn more

→ **Medical Society Consortium on Climate & Health**

→ **ATL Rising: Building Resilience in the Face of Extreme Heat**

Measure, manage, and monitor

What gets measured gets managed. Begin by collecting data on your climate and health equity impacts and commit to ongoing measurement, management, and monitoring.

Consider integrating the following questions into your sustainability key performance indicators:

◆ What are the health impacts of the business (physical, mental, social determinants of health, etc.) and who is most affected?

◆ What potential health inequities does the business exacerbate?

◆ Who are key affected stakeholders for the business? Are they represented in the businesses decision-making processes?

Integrate climate and health considerations in future initiatives, as demonstrated with the following examples:

◆ Perhaps a business is implementing a renewable energy project in a few key geographies. To consider health equity, it measures air quality in those geographies, identifies local populations disproportionately affected by poor air quality, and adjust the project to ensure equitable, clean air access.

◆ Perhaps a business is redesigning or launching a new product or service. Before launch, it studies potential climate, health, and equity implications and adjusts during product development.

◆ A business is considering opening a new, green manufacturing location, however in doing so, the local community would be displaced. The business involves local leadership in decision-making processes to develop mutually beneficial solutions.

With data insights, set goals based on clear insights and align them with your company's sustainability targets. Integrate health equity into your sustainability strategy and regularly measure and report on progress toward goals.

CASE STUDY

Creating tools for healthy businesses

Skanska is a construction and development company and often gets asked how to make building more sustainable. While LEED and WELL certifications are a great start, Skanska recognizes the need to do more on reducing climate impacts and improving health outcomes.

As a solution, Skanska created the Sustainable Facility Management Guide and Embodied Carbon in Construction Calculator (EC3) to help companies, designers, and constructors make their buildings more environmentally and socially sustainable. Skanska also collaborates with peers to innovate and enhance building performance, by:

- **Providing Expertise:** In partnership with the Urban Land Institute, Skanska provides technical feedback and investment on heat resilience in the building industry to support Houston communities suffering from the health impacts of extreme heat. Skanska also regularly presents on resiliency measures and consults with municipalities on community resiliency strategies.

- **Investing in Research:** With the Urban Land Institute and Rocky Mountain Institute, Skanska works to identify sustainable construction best practices, demystify perceived barriers to decarbonization, and share additional opportunities for improvement.

- **Moving to Net Zero:** In partnership with the city of New York, Skanska is at the forefront of the Living Building Challenge, delivering more net-zero buildings than any other contractor.

- **Sourcing Responsibly:** As a board member of Mindful Materials, Skanska supports the implementation of lower carbon building products which are safer for people and promote better health outcomes, such as Heidelberg concrete.

Key takeaways for business:

LEAN ON INDUSTRY EXPERTS

By utilizing Skanska's sustainability guide and this Toolkit, businesses can learn from those who have already begun work at the climate and health equity nexus.

PARTNER WITH RESEARCHERS

A person's zip code is a key determinant to their health outcome. Be prepared to address disparities across demographics, and invest in research and resources to ensure stakeholders are resilient, no matter where they may live.

LOOK INWARD

Each business has a unique opportunity to contribute positively to the climate and health nexus based off their existing business offerings and operations. Consider where your business can provide unique solutions to its existing industry and work with peers to move the industry toward sustainable solutions.

Learn more

→ **Skanska Living Future**

→ **Skanska Health Places**

→ **Skanska Designing Living Buildings**

SKANSKA

Insights from Skanska

→ **PLANTS**

Potted plants, integrated vegetated roofs, green walls, and onsite park environments provide better air quality and improve mental health.

→ **AIR QUALITY**

Advanced monitoring, higher MERV or carbon activated filtration, UV treatment, and chemical use restrictions provide improved air quality across the building.

→ **WATER ACCESS**

Ensure water is available easily throughout the building.

→ **HYGIENE**

Consider design elements that reduce the risk of germ growth and spread of viruses and disease.

→ **HEALTHY, ACCESSIBLE FOOD**

Prioritize providing healthy, affordable food for all employees.

→ **NATURAL LIGHT**

Ensure everyone has roughly the same access to daylight or implement a 'free address' policy so that employees can choose where they sit day-to-day.

→ **PHYSICAL HEALTH**

Provide ergonomic furniture, free access to exercise equipment or instruction, nature-oriented materials and images, and adaptable monitors, desks, and lighting for all.

→ **SOUND POLLUTION**

Apply sound masking systems and other sound attenuation strategies in all areas.

→ **WELLNESS SPACE**

Provide wellness rooms, quiet zones, meditation spaces, and/or dedicated outdoor spaces to all employees.

→ **CHILDCARE**

Provide a space for subsidized childcare that is easily accessible by your employees.

→ **REDUCE HEAT**

Reducing heat island effects from buildings through green roofs and white surfaces reduces impacts on the environment and neighborhoods surrounding the company's facilities.

FUN FACT

Skanska provides its construction employees with electrolyte popsicles to reduce risk of dehydration and heat stress.

Embed climate and health equity throughout your organization

Lasting change is only possible when initiatives are aligned to a business' objectives, mission, and vision.
All parties should be on board: from the board and executives to department leads and their teams.

The steps outlined above will require meaningful investment in the form of direct funding, expanded research and development, paid partnerships, or increased staffing.

Incorporate climate and health equity into your decision-making processes, governance structures, and policy priorities to ensure they are evaluated and prioritized across the business as an enduring part of your strategy rather than a short-term project.

CONSIDER:

◆ Value propositions such as operational efficiency, reduced costs, and increased product qualities to align climate, health, equity, and business decisions.

◆ Where health equity can be incorporated into existing operations, sustainability initiatives, and corporate philanthropy.

◆ Evaluating if trade associations align with stakeholder needs. Utilize existing resources such as:

Transform to Net Zero: Climate Policy Engagement Transformation Guide

Ceres: Responsible Policy Engagement Analysis

Environmental Defense Fund: The AAA Framework for Climate Policy Leadership: A Guide for Companies

CASE STUDY

Addressing air pollution through community engagement and policy advocacy

Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles (PSR-LA) is a non-profit organization that works to build a democratic, equitable, and just society powered by thriving communities and a regenerative economy that values the environment, human rights, and health. In south LA, air pollution is a decades-long issue impacting residents' health and livelihoods. Many families in south LA have experienced losses in their families from dry cleaning chemicals. While local small businesses, such as auto body shops and dry cleaners, are beginning to understand the importance and their role in contributing to and mitigating air pollution, their limited margins and difficulty accessing technological solutions make change difficult.

As a solution, PSR-LA launched the South Central LA Project (SCLA-PUSH) to understand the sources and health impacts of local air pollution (e.g., from industries like dry cleaning, auto body, and metal manufacturing) and prepare for a historic California environmental justice bill (AB-617). SCLA-PUSH ensures community members are equipped to understand the health impacts of poor air quality and strategies for policy advocacy. The initiative is led by a steering committee of residents and experts. For instance, technical experts focused on green technology availability, such as wet cleaning systems and energy-efficient boilers that reduce emissions and toxins in dry cleaning.

Due to AB-617, SCLA-PUSH has received $10 million from local air districts. It has begun by installing air pollution monitors, widespread upskilling on air quality, and transitioning to safe technologies and processes.

Key takeaways for business:

ALIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

As seen with AB-617, policy decisions can have massive impact. Ensure your business' trade associations and policy priorities are aligned with your climate, health, and equity commitments. A misalignment can undermine trust with stakeholders and hinder progress. Collaborate with local advocates in your value chain.

RESPECT COMMUNITY VOICES AND ENGAGE AUTHENTICALLY

Lean on and invest in community experts like PSR-LA to support equitable and effective solutions.

DESIGN-OUT POLLUTION

Reduce pollution from cradle to grave, with the protection of people and the planet at the center.

Learn more

→ **PSR-LA Community Air Protection Program**

CASE STUDY

Promoting health equity through corporate philanthropy and partnership

By constantly bringing breakthrough innovations to market, **Siemens Healthineers** enables healthcare professionals to deliver high-quality care, leading to the best possible outcome for patients. Siemens Healthineers pioneers breakthroughs in healthcare. For everyone. Everywhere. Sustainably.

Siemens Healthineers recognizes healthcare is a global challenge, exacerbated by climate change and worsened for existing underserved and vulnerable populations. Its Executive Leadership, Government Affairs, and Corporate Communications teams partnered with the Siemens Foundation via investments into the following initiatives:

◆ **Choose Healthy Life** is the leading national faith-based initiative addressing health disparities in Black Americans. They increase access to health screenings, vaccinations, and resources through health navigators.

◆ **The National Alliance for Hispanic Health** provides health and human services to over 1 million people per year. Activities include ¡Vive tu vida! Get Up! Get Moving!®, a series promoting wellness and healthy lifestyles in Hispanic communities.

◆ **Washington Association for Community Health** expands healthcare access through the In-REACH training program. This program increases apprenticeships for medical and dental assistants, creating a more diverse workforce and economic opportunities.

In addition, Siemens Healthineers develops 10+ year value partnerships with health systems globally to address health equity issues within their patient network, such as healthcare workforce shortages, cost containment, operational performance, access to quality care, and digitalization and technology optimization.

Key takeaways for business:

THINK GLOBAL, WORK LOCAL

By collaborating with local communities most impacted by climate and health equity, companies can realize on-the-ground solutions. Community organizations best understand local needs and have the network to properly distribute support. What may be perceived as small actions—such as monetary support or sponsorship—can have the greatest potential for positive impact when distributed effectively and equitably.

UTILIZE PARTNERSHIPS

Identify organizations that align with your company's purpose to expand impact and demonstrate the greater collective power of action.

Learn more

→ **Siemens Healthineers Partnerships**

→ **Siemens Healthineers Health Equity**

Recommendations and next steps

Challenges at the climate and health equity nexus impact people, business, and society every day. Urgent action is needed to ensure people and the planet can thrive.

It is hoped you will take the insights from this Toolkit back to your respective organizations to center health within your climate plans and partner with affected stakeholders.

Follow the LinkedIn pages

→ **CHEC (Centering Health Equity in Climate Action)**

→ **BSR (Business for Social Responsibility)**

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Become a member

→ CHEC by contacting **aazmat@bsr.org**

→ BSR by email **web@bsr.org** or input a request **here**

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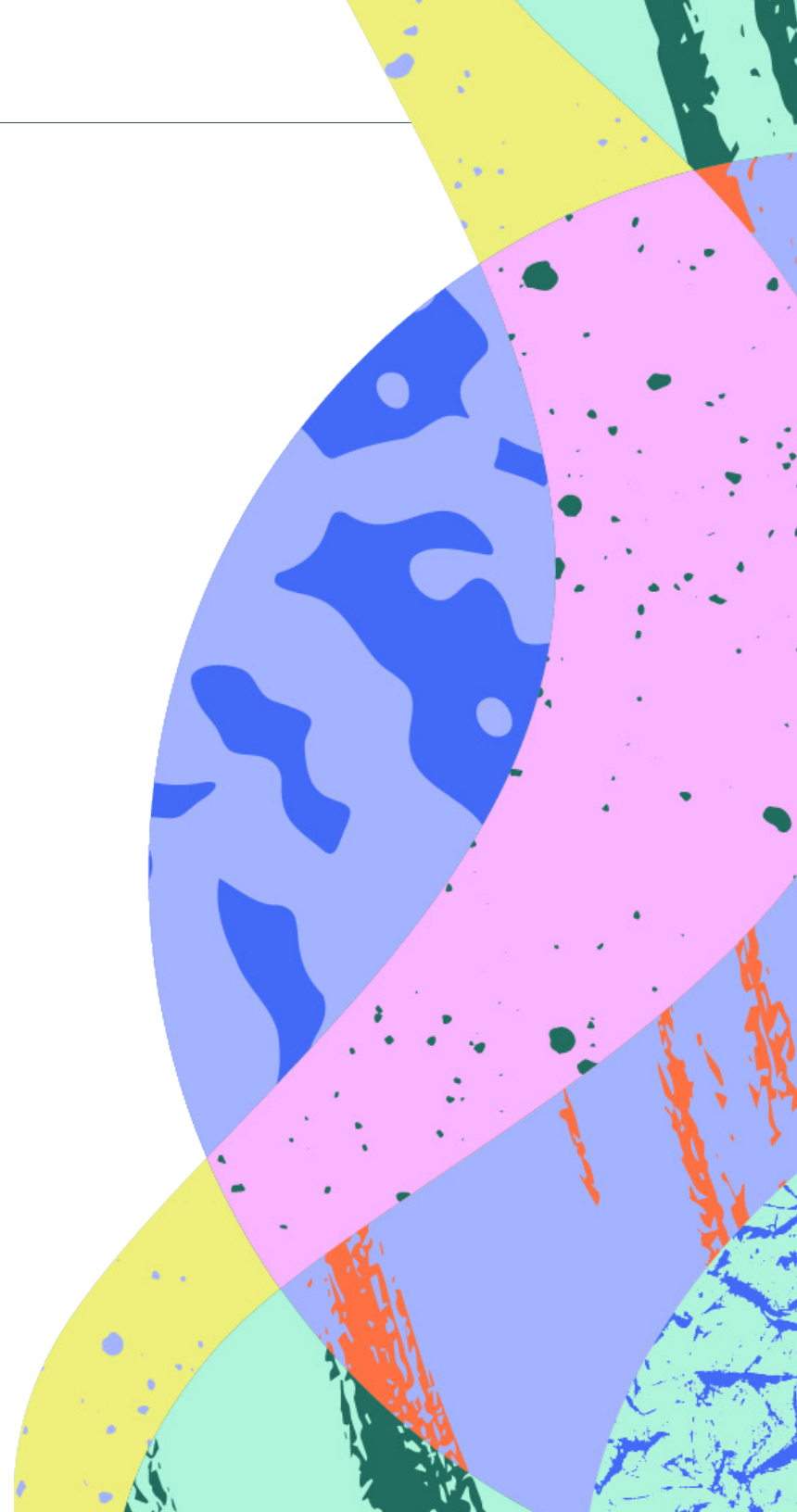
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