

VCCA

Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action



Strategic Plan
2022 – 2025

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Samantha Ahdoot, MD

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends and Supporters,

In 2016, two pediatricians, three internal medicine physicians, a respiratory therapist, a clinical pharmacologist, and a hospital sustainability manager met in a conference room to discuss a threat and an opportunity. Each of us recognized both the rising risk climate change posed to our patients and the potential for clinicians like ourselves to help advance solutions.

What an amazing six years it has been since that day. Our group of eight has grown into an organization of over 450 members across Virginia. We have held dozens of educational and advocacy events, authored or been featured in over 60 media pieces, developed research papers and policy reports, created a climate and health education collaborative program, and have full-time staff and a fellowship program. Since 2016, Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action has grown into a full-fledged organization and has built a network of educated clinician leaders advocating for a healthy climate future for Virginia.

Clinicians Rising for a Healthy Future:

Across the country and the world, clinicians are coming together to incorporate climate solutions into healthcare and healthcare into climate solutions. The national Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health has fostered the development of 22 state organizations similar to VCCA. Climate and health education programs are being launched at academic centers across the U.S. Clinicians are using our voices to ensure that the health of our patients and communities is always top priority in local, state, and national climate policymaking. Collaborating with a broad network of partners, we are seeing real results. Virginia has passed three landmark climate policies since our inception. We have launched two climate and health electives at schools of health training and are planning a third. We were there to support disenfranchised communities in their fight for environmental justice in Charles City and Buckingham Counties.

And we've only just begun.

VCCA members are deeply engaged in our healthcare communities. We are on the front lines in hospitals and clinics caring for patients, educating trainees, working in hospitals and clinics, and doing healthcare research. We are eager to build on our strengths and our networks to help lead, sustain, and expand Virginia's diverse collaboration of organizations working to promote climate solutions in our state.

In this strategic plan, we lay out our plans for the next three years. VCCA will strengthen its foundation by ensuring geographic, professional, and ethnic diversity of our clinician members to better promote a healthier climate future for all Virginians. We will deepen our advocacy work and serve as the leading state resource for high-quality health and climate research. VCCA will continue to expand our Climate and Health Education Collaborative and the incorporation of climate education within Virginia's schools of health training. We will further engage Virginia's health community by leading climate-smart healthcare campaigns and engaging with them on state policy. Finally, we will deepen our commitment to environmental justice by ensuring every action we take is grounded in equity and fairness for all.

VCCA has built a framework for clinicians to serve as educators and advocates for climate solutions in Virginia. In the years ahead, we will both strengthen this foundation of programs and further develop the potential of our unique healthcare network. As you read further about our vision and plans for strategic growth, I hope you too will share our vision for a healthy tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping initial "S" that loops around the first part of the name.

Mission

Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action educates and mobilizes clinician leaders to bring the health voice to climate policymaking in Virginia.

Vision

Virginia will become a national model for equitable climate change solutions that protect the health of all Virginians.

Theory of Change

Clinicians have the knowledge and mission to play a vital role in protecting the health of Virginia's families and communities from the effects of climate change. This clinical voice can overcome entrenched partisan and economic barriers, by focusing on the health benefits of climate solutions and the health dangers of inaction.

Background and Accomplishments

Six years ago, the voice of the health community was absent from climate policy discussion in Virginia. Recognizing this void, a small group of clinicians came together in late 2016 to build support for climate action by introducing a health perspective that is trusted, respected, rooted in science, and nonpartisan. Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action (VCCA) was founded in March of 2017 to fill this void.

Since that time, VCCA has grown dramatically. We have brought a strong healthcare voice in support of state climate policy solutions, have developed climate and health curricula for Virginia schools of health training, and have supported environmental advocacy groups by providing health-related data and medical experts to speak up on the health impacts of climate change. VCCA has firmly established itself as an integral and effective organization in the climate advocacy space.

After receiving a number of grants in 2020, VCCA was able to bolster its impact. This was despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic put a strain on the ability of the organization to recruit overburdened health professionals, and forced us to utilize nontraditional recruitment and advocacy tactics. VCCA grew in size, instituted a successful “Health in Virginia’s Changing Climate” webinar series, and mobilized our membership to influence policy virtually.

At the time of this strategic plan, VCCA has a network of over 450 clinicians who can be activated for climate action at the local, state, and federal level.

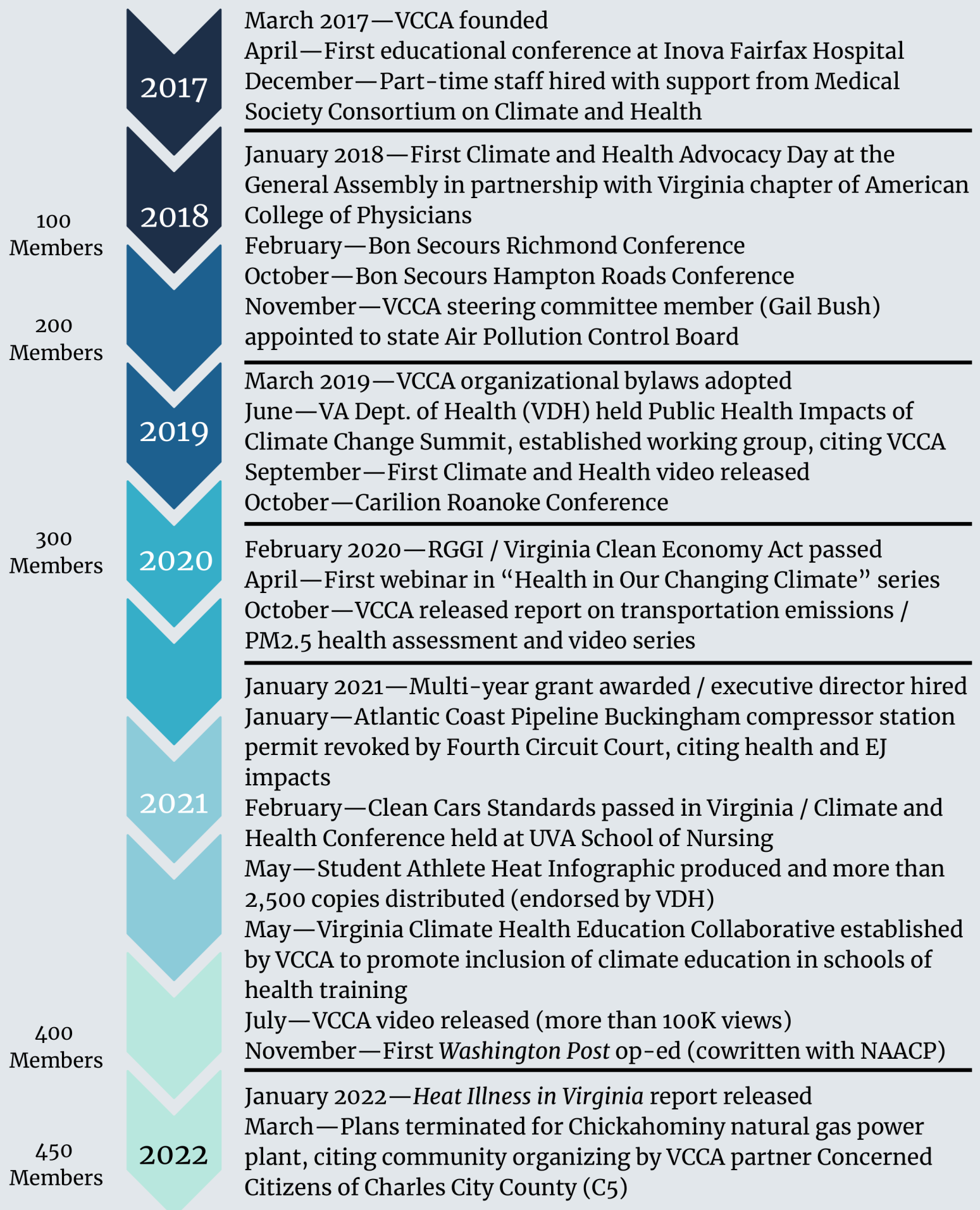
VCCA has had significant impact on climate advocacy in the state, and has supported and expanded climate action in the following ways:

- Partnered with state medical societies to draft resolutions and take collective action on climate and health.
- Developed online climate resources and provided policy guidance to the Virginia chapters of the American College of Physicians (ACP) and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).
- Organized healthcare workers to promote stronger sustainability measures within hospitals and advocated for healthcare institutions to engage in state climate policymaking.
- Worked in coalition with Virginia climate partners, providing data-driven research and a health perspective. For example, in 2020, VCCA developed a Health Impact Assessment Report analyzing the health harms of transportation pollution in the commonwealth and benefits of reform. The report was widely cited in legislation development and passage.
- Supported environmental justice groups with health-related data to bolster their advocacy and amplify their voice in policymaking.
- Since 2018, mobilized clinicians in white coats to support a statewide clean energy economy by hosting annual General Assembly Advocacy Day in Richmond. Our 2022 event included 75 attendees.
- Supported education and advocacy on the health impacts of climate change by speaking out on these issues in state, national, and international media (more than 80 articles).

- Developed creative content to engage the public and policymakers:
 - VCCA produced an infographic on student athlete heat protection to bring awareness and attention to climate health impacts, focusing on practical solutions to ensure the health and safety of active young Virginians. Distributed more than 2,500 copies to pediatric offices in the state.
- Launched the Virginia Climate and Health Education Collaborative to incorporate climate change curriculum into schools of health training across the state and to engage the next generation of healthcare professionals in climate advocacy. The collaborative currently involves students from six schools of medicine, two schools of nursing, one school of pharmacy and the Shenandoah University Physician Assistant Program.

As VCCA celebrates five years since its founding, we find that our growing organization is increasingly called upon to provide a health perspective on the impact of the climate crisis in Virginia. VCCA leadership therefore chose to undertake a strategic planning process to guide our growth and most effectively determine the work of the organization for the next three years.

Major Milestones



Organizational Chart

STEERING COMMITTEE

Samantha Ahdoot, MD
Chair

Neelu Tummala, MD
Vice Chair, Public Relations

Robert Kitchen, MD
Vice Chair, Advocacy

Krupal Shah, MD
Vice Chair, Outreach

Nick Snow, MD
*Vice Chair,
Operations & Recruitment*

Nick Snow, MD
Homan Wai, MD
*Vice Chairs,
Education*

Mona Sarfaty, MD
Jerome A. Paulson, MD
*Medical Society
Consortium Advisors*

STAFF

John Bagwell
Executive Director

Catherine Read
*Program Director
(part time)*

2 Climate and Health
Fellows

STEERING COMMITTEE AT LARGE

Pam Tinker, PT
Lena Bichell, Medical Student
Isabel Contreras, Medical Student
James Klenkar, JD

Irène P. Mathieu, MD
Matthew Meyer, MD
Tracy Kelly, DNP, MSN, CPNP-P/AC

MORE THAN 450 GENERAL MEMBERS

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING – FISCAL SPONSOR

*STATE AFFILIATE OF
THE MEDICAL SOCIETY CONSORTIUM ON CLIMATE AND HEALTH*

Strategic Planning Process

VCCA launched a strategic planning process in March 2022. This began with establishing a timeline for planning, including the iterative stages necessary to complete the process, and then a historical review of documents, interviews, an in-person planning meeting, and finalizing of goals, objectives, and tactics.

Interviews were conducted with VCCA steering committee members (10) and external partners (8). Interview questions covered historical impact and looking ahead; structure and management, including an analysis of seeking 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) nonprofit status; and programmatic priorities, aspirations, and how VCCA could be a better partner to external organizations. VCCA members also had input into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. An in-person planning meeting was held on May 7, 2022 in Richmond which covered visioning, goal and objective setting, ideas on tactics, and discussion of resources and funding possibilities.

It became clear during internal interviews that it was premature to decide on becoming a 501(c)(3) organization during this particular strategic planning process, given the relative youth of the organization and the need to first bolster its structure, staffing, and fundraising. At present, Virginia Organizing provides everything that VCCA needs for healthy and stable operations, and does not limit the pursuit of VCCA's core objectives.

Strategic Planning Process (cont.)

In addition, external partners were unanimously opposed to VCCA becoming a 501(c)(4) organization. Partners said that this would politicize the group, and that in the current political environment, VCCA is one of the few environmental/climate action organizations that can potentially engage elected officials on both sides of the aisle. Medical professionals remain highly trusted, providing VCCA with an opportunity to reach new constituencies with a health-based message. In addition, the organization does not yet have the membership numbers or funding that would make it impactful operating in the 501(c)(4) space. The executive and steering committees agreed with this analysis. VCCA may reconsider this issue during its next strategic planning session, especially if it has grown further and the political environment has shifted.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- Nimble
- Non-partisan
- Has name recognition and credibility, fills a niche
- Active core membership
- Punching above its weight
- Stays true to the health perspective
- Existing ties to health system
- Expertise
- Willing to take risks
- Trusted messenger
- Diverse health professionals and trainees engaged
- Passionate people

WEAKNESSES

- New type of organization. Not always clear which are the most high-impact activities
- Staff bandwidth
- Small group doing heavy-lifting/burnout
- Lacks adequate organizational infrastructure
- Limited engagement with medical societies, VDH
- Limited engagement with conservatives
- Lack of diversity (geographical, racial, professional)
- Limited voice/influence within health systems

OPPORTUNITIES

- Broad possible partnership base
- Climate related health impacts becoming clearer/more interest in emphasizing these
- Better technological expertise
- Broader health systems becoming more engaged on climate
- Federal government aligned (HHS pledge)

THREATS

- Funding
- So many opportunities/hard to prioritize
- Challenging political landscape/climate-denying politicians
- Fossil fuel industry has vested interest in supporting status quo, making change hard
- Ongoing impact of COVID-19 on interest/burned-out health professionals
- State health systems not fully committed to climate action

STRATEGIC VISION

2022–2025

In a short time, VCCA has established itself as an integral part of the climate action landscape in Virginia. It has a powerful message to share that resonates across party lines and with the public. Hotter summers and milder winters, more intense storms, and longer and stronger pollen seasons mean that the impacts of climate change are increasingly felt and recognized by everyone. The human health effects of a changing climate can no longer be ignored. Health professionals are being sought out to provide education, raise awareness, and serve as an impartial voice for solutions that protect the health and welfare of all Virginians.

VCCA has become this sought-out voice and has grown rapidly in size and impact. The accomplishments outlined above demonstrate the value of the organization in the policy advocacy landscape. In order to sustain this momentum, a core focus for VCCA in the next three years needs to be on bolstering its infrastructure by securing unrestricted funding and hiring additional staff. Increasing staff capacity will reduce the burden on our leadership team of health professional volunteers, increase our ability to bring the health voice into new coalitions and policy forums, and help facilitate new opportunities where VCCA's strategic value is needed. Recognizing this, VCCA's first goal is to build our internal structure and capacity to ensure long-term stability of the organization.

VCCA's strength has been in its membership, especially its dedicated core members who make up the executive and steering committees. It has had success recruiting new members but recognizes the need for more diverse representation and an increase in capacity among this group in order to truly fulfill its mission to promote the health and future of all Virginians. VCCA also recognizes that current members may become overburdened with the demands of the

STRATEGIC VISION (cont)

growing organization. To ensure that this core group is not stretched too thin, and to foster a more geographically, professionally, and ethnically diverse membership, VCCA's second goal is to increase, diversify, and deepen the engagement of its new and current membership.

VCCA has already supported positive policy change in Virginia with health-based data and an impartial, mission-driven voice for solutions. VCCA acknowledges the critical advocacy role it plays in providing coalition partners, especially smaller grassroots environmental justice organizations, with key data and credible messengers to amplify their voice in policymaking. In the next three years, VCCA seeks to elevate its status in legislative forums and support the climate advocacy community with health-based messaging, climate research, and reports. VCCA can amplify this advocacy by strengthening its social media presence while continuing its highly successful traditional media messaging.

VCCA's educational goal is to ensure that all health practitioners and trainees in Virginia understand the links between climate change and health, and have the tools, skills, and motivation to advocate for action to protect the health of their patients. VCCA has already made significant progress with the creation of the Virginia Climate and Health Education Collaborative and the incorporation of climate and health curriculum into two schools of health training in the state (University of Virginia School of Medicine and Shenandoah University Physician Assistant Program). We will continue to expand the Collaborative, meeting yearly with trainees from a widening network of institutions, and we will bring climate and health education to more Virginia schools of health training.

STRATEGIC VISION (cont)

Student members of the organization are a key area of growth and their presence in the medical field ensures long-term sustainability of climate change advocacy. The education committee will further its work in this space and expand education efforts, which will also help support the objectives of increasing and diversifying membership. In addition, VCCA will continue to use grand rounds, presentations to health professionals, and regular webinars to reach clinicians across the state.

Finally, the organization recognizes its unique role in healthcare sustainability. Healthcare, as an industry, is a significant source of heat-trapping emissions. VCCA therefore will further our support for Virginia becoming a leader in sustainable healthcare systems. This work is challenging and slow, and requires advocacy from both within and outside the healthcare community. VCCA will assume a leadership role in this area by working to establish a coalition of healthcare partners in support of the transition to climate-smart healthcare in Virginia. Healthcare Without Harm, the leading international organization in healthcare sustainability, will be a key VCCA partner in this work. VCCA also recently joined the National Academy of Medicine's Climate Collaborative Network, which we hope will provide new opportunities for leadership and collaboration.

Below, you will find each of these goals with corresponding objectives and tactics that VCCA will use to accomplish them. In the following months, VCCA staff and members will focus on attaching timelines and action plans to each objective and tactic.

THREE-YEAR GOALS

1. Build the internal structure and capacity of VCCA to ensure long-term stability of the organization.
2. Increase, diversify, and deepen the engagement of new and current membership.
3. Advance local, state, and national climate policy solutions that protect the health of all Virginians.
4. Ensure that all health practitioners and trainees in Virginia understand the links between climate change and health.
5. Support Virginia in becoming a leader in sustainable healthcare systems.

Goal 1: Build the internal structure and capacity of VCCA to ensure long-term stability of the organization.

Increase staff capacity to support the volunteer membership and execute the ambitious objectives in this strategic plan.

- By the end of 2023, VCCA will have 2 full-time staff members.
- By the end of 2025, VCCA will have 3 full-time staff members.
- Recruit two new fellows for the 2022-23 academic year (and every academic year) focusing on research/advocacy/social media support.

Formalize and create a pipeline for leadership opportunities to bolster the ongoing work of VCCA.

- Undertake a process to review the 2019 bylaws, including examination and analysis of the following: clarify exec/steering committees-chair succession plan; committees and structure (consider adding fundraising committee; EJ committee and combining outreach and membership); composition of steering committee; joining/resigning/leaves of absence.
- Dedicate time after this review for discussion and collaborative revisions. Have steering committee members comment/revise online, discuss at several steering committee meetings.
- Increase diversification of the steering committee, including representatives from historically Black colleges & universities (HBCUs) with health sciences, a wider variety of health professions and geographic representation.
- Identify ways to encourage ongoing involvement of steering committee members in execution of this plan.

Identify and secure unrestricted multi-year funding to meet staffing needs and long-term sustainability of VCCA.

- Identify unrestricted, multi-year funding to secure an annual budget of \$300–400,000/year.
- Create a monthly fundraising call by end of summer 2022 to further involve the steering committee in this aspect of the work.
- Ask existing funders for introductions to other foundations.
- Invite membership to join a fundraising committee (pending decisions under goal 2).
- Use funder research to apply/send out letters of interest to at least 3–5 organizations/foundations annually.
- Institute an annual online fall fundraising event for membership.

Goal 2: Increase, diversify, and deepen the engagement of new and current membership.

Increase geographic diversity of membership by identifying and recruiting members in 75% of existing Virginia State Senate districts.

- Develop map of current member location and fill in database details overlaid on State Senate districts.
- Identify large and/or predominant health systems in each senate district.
- Contact each of these health systems to identify contact person.
- Set up meeting in 5-10 districts (e.g., grand rounds-type format of 15 or more clinicians).
- Set up booths at 3 statewide health conferences per year to identify and recruit members (collaborate with the education committee).

Identify and recruit members in 100% of Virginia's federal congressional districts.

- Develop a map of member location and fill in database details overlaid on VA congressional districts.
- Identify large and/or predominant health systems in each VA congressional district.
- Contact each of these health systems to identify contact person.
- Set up meetings in all VA congressional districts.
- Set up booths at 3 statewide health conferences per year to identify and recruit members.

Increase existing member participation in committees and work of the organization.

- Execute a survey of members for demographics, level of activity, interests, and expectations of VCCA.
- Involve broader membership in the bylaws/committee structure review to increase engagement.
- Increase Advocacy Day participation to involve 1 person from 75% of state senate districts.
- Increase committee participation by 50% in 2 years.
- Increase steering committee regional diversity by 5 VA congressional districts in 2 years.

Goal 3: Advance climate solutions that protect the health of all Virginians.

Organize 5–7 legislator meetings (outside of session), including at least 2 Republicans, with the purpose of educating, building relationships, and creating influence with more key members.

- Develop list of target legislators, reviewing voting record, geographic location, etc.
- Identify constituent members from VCCA network, with goal of mapping VCCA members for each region to be engaged for meetings, including student members.
- Support members in holding meetings, which might include creation of a script or a PowerPoint presentation, and in the process for scheduling, etc.
- Get messaging recommendations from [republicEn](#) for Republican legislators.

Strengthen, expand, and support partnerships with the environmental/conservation community in Virginia by providing health-based data and "the health voice" to increase the effectiveness of collective/coalition climate advocacy.

- Develop talking points on 5 key climate–health related issues partners distribute and use in their education/advocacy efforts.
- Develop easy-to-share social media graphics with coalition.
- Collaborate with partners on opinion pieces.
- Invite 4–6 partner representatives to Advocacy Day and other VCCA-led events to strengthen relationships and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- Develop health-specific talking points on at least 3 pieces of priority legislation per General Assembly session.
- Co-sponsor and/or provide health-based speakers and messengers at 2–3 partner-led events per year.

OBJECTIVES AND TACTICS – GOAL 3 (cont)

Deepen relationships with 2 environmental justice (EJ) organizations by supporting/amplifying their projects/policy asks and providing them with data and clinicians to support their message.

- Host an educational event with 2–3 EJ orgs on the connection between EJ and health inequities.
- Establish a vice-chair position for EJ activities/initiatives to enhance focus.
- Hold at least 2–4 EJ-focused webinars (over 3 years) .
- Explore collaboration with HBCU health-focused students and/or faculty in this objective.

Produce and implement a social media strategy to expand VCCA's presence on four platforms, committing to more consistent and proactive engagement that benefits VCCA and its partners.

- Continue to utilize traditional media to elevate the voice of health professionals, which can then be amplified on social media.
- Undertake social media review and determine optimal frequency for posts to maximize advocacy impact.
- Develop process for submitting messages for posts.
- Once staff capacity is expanded, have social media management be a major component of that job.

Goal 4: Ensure that all health practitioners and trainees in Virginia understand the links between climate change and health.

Continue yearly Virginia Climate and Health Education Collaborative (VCHEC) summit to engage new student leaders in climate-health education.

- Organize a formal VCHEC planning committee with student involvement.
- Target May each year for summit.
- Rotate location to promote engagement of various schools.
- Collaborate with advocacy committee on how to encourage student attendees to engage in advocacy actions, attend Advocacy Day, etc.

Implement further curriculum integration in 5 existing VCHEC healthcare professional schools.

- Define current state climate/health education and define goals: new elective, new track, new preclinical year curriculum integration. Track progress at committee meetings.
- Employ VCHEC summit to share ideas and discuss approach.
- Share resources for wider dissemination on website.

Incorporate 2 additional healthcare professional schools into VCHEC.

- Create list of all health profession programs in VA to better understand landscape for outreach.
- Organize an outreach blitz (email and student-to-student contact) to untapped health programs, including deans.

Educate 100 new practicing healthcare professionals about the connection of climate and health.

- Continue to support climate/health conference hosted by UVA School of Nursing.
- Organize separate climate and health conferences in Virginia, with rotating location.
- Continue quarterly VCCA webinar (commit to getting CMEs for nurses) and quarterly combined CCA webinar (for a total of 8 per year). Poll audience for number of first-timers at webinar.
- Set up booth/table at 2 or more conferences a year for education and recruitment of members and include universities or colleges without medical schools, but with health sciences, to increase diversity.
- Work with membership committee on identifying HBCUs for outreach.
- Track rate of new VCCA sign-ups and identify trends for future outreach.

Incorporate environmental justice throughout educational materials and efforts.

- Reach out to schools from underrepresented sectors (like HBCUs or more rural areas of the state).
- Rotate conference locations for geographical diversity.
- Explore feasibility of creating a new program (aspirational):
 - Evaluate models from George Washington University, California schools, etc.

Goal 5: Support Virginia in becoming a leader in sustainable healthcare systems.

Create and lead a coalition (hospitals, clinicians, patients, supportive organizations) which understands, supports, and leads advocacy efforts around healthcare sustainability/carbon reduction initiatives.

- Support and encourage healthcare systems to join the coalition and pursue carbon reduction efforts through ongoing outreach and engagement of staff and leadership.
- Organize a 6-month campaign around the Health & Human Services pledge to reduce emissions and increase resilience.
- Work with coalition members to refine and amplify attention to health messages in the climate change space by:
 - Developing coalition talking points on healthcare sustainability.
 - Developing easy-to-share social media graphics.
- Organize and support coalition representatives in meeting legislators to deliver powerful messages on health and climate change.

Work in partnership with healthcare systems to advance net-zero policies at the state and federal level.

- Develop relationships with hospital sustainability managers, leveraging good existing relationships with INOVA and Carilion to open new doors.
- Use VCCA membership to support outreach and facilitate relationships with new healthcare systems.
- Partner with Healthcare Without Harm, My Green Doctor, and others for tools and ideas needed to educate and advocate for change.
- Educate coalition partners so they support VCCA advocacy efforts on this issue.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

VCCA would like to thank Catherine Read for leading the strategic planning process, which resulted in this final report.

VCCA could not do its work without our fantastic and committed members.

We thank funders and partners for their ongoing support.

Special thanks to those organizations that spent time providing feedback for this plan.