

# Lead on climate change to 'make America great again,' respiratory doctors urge Trump

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If the new US President wants to keep his promise to 'make America great again,' then he should follow the example of the late British premier Margaret Thatcher on climate change, say a group of UK and US respiratory doctors, in an editorial published online in the international journal *Thorax*.

By doing so, Donald Trump, a self-confessed admirer of Mrs Thatcher, would not only leave a lasting legacy for the good of the planet, but would also give a huge boost to the nation's health and finances, they argue.

Recognising the magnitude of the threat posed by the growing hole in the earth's ozone layer in the mid-1980s, Margaret Thatcher threw her weight behind international efforts to ban chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) used in refrigeration and aerosol sprays. She worked with the then US President, Ronald Reagan, to secure the Montreal Protocol which phased out the manufacture and use of these chemicals in 1987.

Although it will take until 2060 before the [ozone layer](#) fully recovers, without this decisive action the world would already be 3°C warmer, say the authors. And this, combined with increased levels of radiation, would have left much of the planet uninhabitable by the middle of this century, they insist.

"A similar challenge faces us now," they warn. Rising temperatures and disrupted ecosystems as a result of climate change increase the risk of

[vector borne diseases](#), such as malaria, and crop failure; and boost exposure to harmful algae/pollen/moulds and the effects of air pollution—now the third leading cause of death worldwide after [high blood pressure](#) and smoking.

These consequences disproportionately exact a heavy toll on those who already have heart and lung conditions, and the poor, they say.

"Responding directly to the threat of climate change will require innovation and global leadership. Action now is crucial if we are to protect the health of our people now and in future generations," they write.

They have a suggested 'to do' list for the new President:

- Acknowledge the scale of the problem: this would clearly signal to business that low carbon represents an opportunity for investment and it would support international efforts to reach agreement
- Use government policy to drive investment and build markets: this would foster innovation and create jobs
- Move away from fossil fuels to clean energy to curb CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and promote new technologies
- Speed up a ban on hydrofluorocarbons, powerful greenhouse gases
- Prioritise active green transport, such as cycling and walking, and the provision of public transport, not only to curb carbon emissions and improve air quality, but also to boost health and fitness

There is no doubt that limiting climate change now will cost far less than tackling its consequences in the future, the authors point out.

"There is a practical and moral imperative to take action now to reduce current and future impacts of climate change. These actions have the potential also to improve health and prosperity directly," they emphasise.

"If Trump wants America to lead, then he needs to be at the front of the international [climate change](#) pack, not at the back," they conclude. "No one else will be quitting the race onwards to the betterment of their peoples."

**More information:** Editorial: Climate change and lung health—a challenge for a new President, [thorax.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/thoraxjnl-2017-209978](https://thorax.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/thoraxjnl-2017-209978)

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