

Essential Actions for Climate Resilience in Local Health Departments



Climate change is a serious public health issue. Communities affected by environmental injustices and socioeconomic inequities are disproportionately at risk from health impacts of climate change. Local health departments (LHDs) are uniquely positioned to identify and communicate the human health risks of climate change and develop interventions that reduce these risks to improve health and promote equity. This document suggests actions for local public health authorities to begin examining the local health impacts of climate change.

LEARN: Enhance Climate Literacy

- Educate yourself and your LHD staff about the risks and health impacts of climate change.
- Review existing risk assessments and community vulnerability assessments with a climate change lens.
- Research best practices and successful resilience strategies (e.g., connect with experts, attend conferences, join listservs, participate in workgroups) to incorporate a climate change focus into all LHD practice areas.
- Provide access for your staff and key partners to relevant resources (e.g., articles, webinars, research papers) to encourage ongoing self-education.

CONNECTIONS WITH CDC'S BRACE FRAMEWORK¹

The actions in this fact sheet complement the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Building Resilience Against Climate Effects (BRACE) Framework, and they are aligned with the three core functions of public health (i.e., assessment, policy development, and assurance). They are aimed at health departments that wish to take specific, measured steps to build climate resilience in their organizations and communities.



PARTICIPATE & DISCUSS: Foster Relationships

- Revisit existing relationships with a climate change lens (i.e., vulnerable population mapping).
- Develop a workgroup or team with stakeholders across LHD programmatic areas.
- Identify and connect with community and organizational initiatives and programs that work on climate hazards and overlap with health (i.e., heat, flooding, wildfire, preparedness, etc.).
- Develop a public outreach/education campaign specific to your community to increase awareness and engagement.
- Engage local academic partners with memoranda of understanding to facilitate research initiatives linking climate change to observed health outcomes.²



CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH EQUITY

The health impacts of climate change will disproportionately burden communities already affected by environmental injustices and socioeconomic inequities. LHDs should develop culturally appropriate resources to build climate resilience for all populations in their communities and look for ways to improve health equity and avoid unintended negative impacts.

COLLABORATE: Partner with Organizations

- Work with and expand key partnerships, initiatives, or programs to improve climate resilience within your jurisdiction.
- Reach out to your community to discuss existing stressors, the potential impact of climate change on those stressors, and strategies to adapt and increase resilience.
- Communicate with members of your community and policymakers regarding your LHD's climate change work to garner support, inform policy, and maintain trust.
- Create or tailor existing trainings and information to educate stakeholders in the private sector.
- Develop a broader community engagement process that empowers historically under-resourced communities to define and implement resilience strategies.

POTENTIAL KEY PARTNERSHIPS TO PLAN FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

- Government agencies (e.g., land use, urban planning, transportation, utilities, flood protection authorities, mental health, environmental health, emergency preparedness, tribal partners, social services)
- Community groups/individuals with a focus on vulnerable populations
- Healthcare providers (e.g., local chapters of professional medical associations and organizations, hospitals)
- Other stakeholders and partners (e.g., National Weather Service local offices, local universities and/or colleges, non-profit organizations, private businesses)

CREATE: Plan Development and Implementation

- Conduct or review a community vulnerability assessment to determine which communities would be most affected by extreme weather conditions likely to occur in your jurisdiction.
- Conduct or review an existing comprehensive needs assessment to determine the capacity and capability of your LHD to address the public health, environment, and health equity consequences of climate change.
- Identify the barriers, facilitators, and opportunities for addressing climate change-associated health impacts, including resource needs and opportunities to maximize co-benefits across existing programs and sectors.
- Develop a climate resilience plan to ensure that your communities are prepared for, can withstand, and thrive amid extreme weather shocks or stressors.
- Collaborate with partners and subject matter experts to develop needed tools or programs (e.g., extreme temperature warning system).

PUBLIC HEALTH CLIMATE RESILIENCE PLAN

Develop and implement a public health climate resilience plan using a risk management-based approach, with consultation from partners. This guidance document should do the following:

- Prioritize needs;
- Implement an equity framework to ensure that all populations, particularly those who have been subject to historic and current inequities, have a voice in the process;
- Identify a plan of action and timeline;
- Set short- and long-term SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely) goals and/or objectives to address identified focus areas; and
- Establish a process to document progress, review the plan, and update workflow.

REFLECT: Metrics and Evaluation

- Identify key indicators for local public health climate change surveillance measurements, including those for which local and/or national data exists.
- Research, evaluate, and report the relationship between key indicators and human health.
- Adopt indicators of exposure to relevant climate events and hazards (e.g., number of extreme heat days).
- Assess data gaps and limitations for tracking health outcomes.
- Identify mechanisms to maintain or enhance surveillance systems to collect data on health outcomes that result from climate-related exposures (e.g., air pollution).
- Identify ways to evaluate effectiveness of climate resilient actions.
- Utilize an adaptive management approach to evaluate and reexamine priorities and plans on an annual basis.
- Share progress with your community, stakeholders, and LHD staff to celebrate success stories, build community engagement, and maintain momentum.
- Develop and provide annual reports to track progress and promote resilience activities.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The health impacts of climate change extend beyond obvious physical effects, directly and indirectly, to psychological impacts. LHDs can support building mental health resilience by doing the following:

- Ensuring availability and access to community mental health resources;
- Reducing disparities by improving health equity; and
- Integrating mental health into resiliency plans.

[FACT SHEET]

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The climate change challenges facing each LHD are unique and can vary widely. Regardless of the challenges, the goals are really the same: identify current and projected health impacts of climate change; develop a plan to reduce and prevent health impacts of climate change; build climate change capacity; increase awareness and community support of adaptation and mitigation efforts; and integrate considerations of health equity, environmental justice, and particularly vulnerable populations into climate change policies. This resource illustrates a variety of ways your LHD can begin or expand your current climate change activities. NACCHO encourages LHDs to take these actions in the order that makes most sense to each department; these actions can meet you where you are and propel you forward to make consistent, continued efforts to address climate change.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Building Resilience Against Climate Effects (BRACE) Framework. Retrieved May 24, 2018, from <https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/BRACE.htm>.
2. American Public Health Association. 2017. Supporting Research and Evidence-Based Public Health Practice in State and Local Health Agencies. Retrieved May 24, 2018, from <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2018/01/18/supporting-research-and-evidence-based-public-health-practice>.

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This fact sheet updates and expands upon the 2014 document *12 Steps to Operationalize Climate Change in a Local Health Department*.

For more information, including case studies, visit NACCHO's climate change webpage and toolkit: <http://bit.ly/NACCHOClimate>.

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments.

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