

12 Steps to Operationalize Climate Change in a Local Health Department



- 1 Understand the meaning of “climate change” and its relationship to “global warming.”**
 - Consider whether local health department (LHD) staff have basic knowledge about the concept. Many people think the terms are interchangeable.
- 2 Understand how climate change affects both health and the environment.**
 - Identify/scope how climate change will affect the LHD’s region.
- 3 Ensure that LHD staff and leadership understand how climate change affects both health and the environment.**
 - Educate LHD management and staff about climate change.
- 4 Identify the LHD’s resources and capacity to address this issue.**
 - Conduct a workforce needs assessment.
 - Consider whether the LHD has the necessary resources to develop potential initiatives.
 - Ask what level of support for climate change initiatives exists among LHD leadership and the community. If people are thinking of developing specific work initiatives, the LHD should determine whether a necessary level of support exists based on the scope of the initiative, i.e., internal/department, city-oriented, or community-wide.
- 5 Identify initiatives—within the LHD’s environmental health area or other departments—that currently exist or could be developed to address the effects of climate change.**
 - Assess existing plans and policies to identify areas where climate change could be addressed (i.e., integrate climate change into existing plans and procedures) and to identify existing practices and programs that could be adapted to address climate change-associated health impacts (e.g., community assessments or mitigation and adaptation work).
- 6 Identify the geographic areas of the community—or populations the LHD serves—that are affected by climate change.**
 - Consider whether the LHD can demonstrate that its work would benefit the community or specific populations.
 - Conduct a community vulnerability assessment to determine which communities would be most affected by the extreme weather conditions likely to occur in a jurisdiction.
 - Conduct a risk assessment.
 - Conduct a vulnerability assessment.
- 7 Develop key indicators for local public health climate change surveillance measurements.**



Learn more about NACCHO’s Climate Change Program at <http://www.naccho.org/topics/environmental/climatechange/>

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Secure support and participation from necessary community partners.

- Determine what level of support exists for climate change initiatives among city/county leadership and community residents.
- Develop/expand key partnerships to plan for climate change adaptation, such as the following:
 - » Government agencies (e.g., land use, transportation, mental health, environmental health, and social services)
 - » Community groups/individuals
 - » Emergency preparedness planners
 - » Healthcare providers
- Develop a workgroup or team with stakeholders from departments throughout the LHD.

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Develop a public health climate adaptation plan using a risk management-based approach, with consultation from partners.

- Based on steps 3, 4, and 5 above, develop a guidance document that does the following:
 - » Prioritizes needs
 - » Identifies a plan of action
 - » Sets short- and long-term goals to address identified focus areas
 - » Establishes a process to document progress, review the plan, and update workflow
- Consider whether the LHD can develop specific goals and objectives concerning this work.
- Consider whether objectives are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-based).
- Identify mitigation and adaptation actions that the LHD can implement in the community.
- Develop a climate change preparedness plan for the jurisdiction to ensure preparedness in responding to climate-driven events.

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Implement the public health climate adaptation plan.

- Collaborate with partners and subject matter experts to develop needed tools or programs such as an extreme temperature warning system or a climate change surveillance system.

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Educate local communities, local healthcare system members, policymakers, LHD staff, and other partners about the plan and its progress.

- Develop a public outreach or education campaign (specific to the LHD's audience) to increase awareness among and engage the public, community stakeholders/partners, and policymakers.
- Promote the LHD's climate change work among the public and policymakers to inform local policy.
- Engage LHD staff and partners through education and training, such as brochures, seminars, annual meetings, and exercises.

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After work has been completed, evaluate that work.

- Evaluate the plan annually and modify it as appropriate.
- Monitor and recognize adaptation or mitigation activities in the jurisdiction.

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References

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