



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES CASE STUDY

Linking climate change and health in California

California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has been successful in bringing the public health perspective to climate change work. Through the process, they have shown that it's possible to create a robust, impactful initiative without much funding. The key is finding ways that climate mitigation and adaptation fit into existing frameworks within both the health department and the activities of partner agencies.

Climate Change: A Growing Concern

California universities, research centers and laboratories have been sounding an alarm about climate change for at least a decade. Early reports showed that the state will see an increase in temperature, changes in precipitation leading to drought, an increase in wildfires and rising sea level.¹ The predicted public health impacts of these changes include heat-related illness, changes in food and water quality and quantity, and an increase in certain vector-borne diseases and chronic diseases such as asthma and cancer.¹ Impacts are already becoming apparent with 2014 bringing one of the most severe droughts in the state's history.

Building a Climate and Health Initiative

In 2005, then Governor Schwarzenegger took notice of the scientific reports and adopted climate change and sustainability as a major focus. With a welcoming political climate, senior leadership in several departments of the State began working together to raise awareness and build staff capacity. Recognizing that the public health perspective was largely missing from important conversations, CDPH began to

identify and expand various cross-cutting initiatives to include public health considerations.

2006

- » AB 32 aims to reduce GHG emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. AB 32 also collects fees from carbon emitters, which provides funding for local community projects and a few climate change positions in the health department. With the help of CDPH, about 25% of the revenue from fees must benefit disadvantaged communities.
- » The statewide Climate Action Team (CAT) is tasked with guiding implementation of AB 32. In partnership with the Air Resources Board, CDPH convenes the CAT's Public Health Workgroup which engages communities to integrate health considerations into local sustainability and GHG reductions plans. Recently, the workgroup invited local health departments to share early successes in mitigation and adaptation planning with peers. CDPH staffs also participate in the land use and research workgroups to ensure the public health perspective is considered.

2007

- » With funding from CDC, the California Environmental Public Health Tracking Program has shown its value by assessing the health impacts of heat waves.
- » A 2007 study sought to identify communities with the highest risk for heat-related illness. Currently, they are working to identify what local health departments can do proactively to prepare for heat waves.

2008

- » SB 375 requires regions to develop Sustainable Communities Strategies that integrate greenhouse gas reductions strategies into existing transportation, land use and housing scenarios. Local health departments around the state are increasingly aware of opportunities to ensure the public health considerations are a part of these planning processes.
- » SB 732 established the Strategic Growth Council, bringing together the leadership of the state health, environmental, transportation, business, natural resources, and planning agencies to identify and promote statewide and regional plans to ensure sustainability. Through this legislation, the Health in All Policies task force was created to bring multiple agencies together to identify common missions and activities that will ensure a healthy and sustainable future. A separate urban greening program provided grants for about 100 small projects in local communities. CDPH worked with a multiagency panel to develop grant requirements to ensure that health equity concerns were considered. As a result, many of these projects aim to make vulnerable communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

2012

- » CDPH's Office of Health Equity received a grant from CDC to implement the Building Resilience Against Climate Effects, or BRACE, framework. The program identifies communities that are the most vulnerable to climate effects and provides small grants to local health departments to prepare for impacts.

Challenges and Successes

Sustaining momentum for this work even within the public health community has been challenging. There is little public or private funding for climate change projects, and even less for addressing climate and health. While the magnitude of the problem requires acting with urgency, the outcomes won't be visible in the near future. The climate related changes are ever shifting, making the identification of appropriate responses and tools difficult.

Despite these challenges, public health has been included in statewide climate change activities and has been successful in engaging both local communities and other sectors and identifying a shared vision for the future. A healthy community will also be sustainable and resilient. Working through the various legislative activities, interagency workgroups and a small amount of grant funding, CDPH has been able to have a noticeable impact without much funding.

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1. California Department of Public Health. "Public Health Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for California." Available at: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CCDPHP/Documents/CA_Public_Health_Adaptation_Strategies_final.pdf. Accessed 10-07-2014

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