

Local Health Departments are preparing for the Health Effects of Climate Change

Seattle & King County, Seattle, Washington

Background

King County, Washington is the 14th most populous county in the U.S., with 1.93 million people.¹ Covering 2,134 rural and urban square miles, King County is home to two tribal nations, 39 cities, 130 special purpose districts, and over 150 spoken languages. It is also home to one of the most diverse zip codes² and one of the most diverse school districts in the nation,³ with 23% percent of residents speaking a language other than English and 19% born in another country. Although deemed one of the healthiest counties nationally, there is significant disparity in life expectancy, years of healthy life, and levels of education and causes of death across geographic and racial groups.

Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) is a large metropolitan health department with approximately 1,500 employees, 40 sites, and a budget of \$318 million that serves all County residents. PHSKC's mission is to identify and promote the conditions under which all people can live within healthy communities and achieve optimum health.

Climate Change in Seattle & King County

King County is situated in the unique geography and climate of the Pacific Northwest and the Puget Sound Region. In 2009 and 2013, the University of Washington's Climate Impacts Group released reports⁴ describing the serious health impacts that climate change will have on Puget Sound residents. These reports indicate that climate change in Washington will likely lead to larger numbers of heat-related injuries and deaths, and that the greater Seattle area in particular can expect substantial mortality during future heat events. The reports document other adverse effects, including more severe and frequent weather events, increased vector, water, and food borne diseases, increased allergies and asthma, and increased social impacts that will affect the public's health.



¹ 2010 Census data

² AOL News. America's Most Diverse ZIP Code Shows the Way. <http://www.aolnews.com/2010/03/25/opinion-americas-most-diverse-zip-code-shows-the-way/>

³ Remade in America. Diversity in the Classroom. *The New York Times*. <http://projects.nytimes.com/immigration/enrollment>

⁴ Washington Climate Change Impacts Assessment (February 2009) and *State of Knowledge Report - Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation in Washington State: Technical Summaries for Decision Makers* (December 2013), Climate Impacts Group, University of Washington

Goal

Currently, PHSKC is working to develop a climate and public health framework for Public Health that reflects the values, concerns and priorities of the local community and public health staff.

Objectives

- Implement an engagement process with both internal (PHSKC and other governmental partners' leadership and staff) and external (community based organizations and community leaders) stakeholders to solicit input and to create ownership;
- Based on the findings from the engagement process, a framework will be drafted and vetted with stakeholders, and lastly;
- Implement a communication strategy to raise awareness about climate change and health, and share the framework broadly with organizational and community partners.



Achievements and Successes

- Participating in the Public Health Institute's Center for Climate Change and Health learning collaborative with 12 other local health jurisdictions
- To ensure that equity and social justice are at the core of the process and the final version of the framework, Public Health is partnering with two local climate justice-oriented community-based organizations to inform this work
- Interviews have been conducted with departmental leadership and community stakeholders on what they perceive as the role of PHSKC related to climate change mitigation and preparedness
- Integrating public health considerations into King County's Strategic Climate Action Plan
- Establishing a voice for public health impacts of climate change in our region



FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Robin Pfohman

Community Resilience + Equity Program Manager

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health>

T: 206.263.8759 | E: Robin.pfohman@kingcounty.gov

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to be a leader, partner, catalyst, and voice with local health departments.

1201 Eye Street, NW, 4th Floor | Washington, DC 20005

P: 202-783-5550 F: 202-783-1583