

A Health in All Policies approach to addressing the health impacts of climate change

Stories from three local health departments



Introduction

Local health departments (LHDs) play a crucial role in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies and disasters and as such, are in the frontline of the fight against the negative effects of climate change. The Are We Ready survey series, conducted by NACCHO in 2008, 2012, and 2023, aims to explore how many LHDs are working specifically on climate-related prevention activities and examines the funding and staffing levels dedicated to climate-specific public health activities. The most recent Are We Ready survey results demonstrate that the majority of our current local public health workforce is not yet addressing the health risks of climate change and does not feel ready to start doing so.

Climate change is a complex issue where adaptation measures that benefit health and well-being are mostly found in other sectors ([IPCC, 2023](#)). Consequently, a comprehensive strategy is needed that addresses climate change by engaging (non-conventional) partners from sectors that traditionally operate outside of the public health system. The Health in All Policies (HiAP) framework ([NACCHO, 2024](#)) provides a structure for how to address the health risks associated with climate change. HiAP is a change in the systems that determine how decisions are made and implemented by local, state, and federal governments to ensure that policy decisions have neutral or beneficial impacts on the determinants of health ([NACCHO, 2023](#)).

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The [HiAP framework](#) consists of seven strategies for implementing HiAP:

1. Develop and structure cross-sector relationships,
2. Incorporate health into decision-making,
3. Enhance workforce capacity,
4. Coordinate funding and investments,
5. Integrate research, evaluation, and data systems,
6. Synchronize communications, and
7. Implement accountability structures.

To provide examples of the various roles HiAP can play in addressing the health impacts of climate change at the local level, NACCHO interviewed three LHDs, the Boston Public Health Commission, the Pima County Health Department and the New Orleans Health Department, to discuss their approaches to climate change.



Boston Public Health Commission: How the country's oldest health department addresses climate change



Background

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) is the country's oldest health department and envisions a thriving Boston where all residents live healthy and fulfilling lives. To accomplish this, BPHC works in partnership with communities to protect and promote the health and well-being of all Boston residents, especially those impacted by racism and systemic inequities. The Commission employs roughly 1,400 employees, which includes personnel at Boston Emergency Medical Services and at Homeless Services. BPHC also responds to environmental conditions, including climate change, that impact the health of all Bostonians.

Approach to Addressing Climate Change

Boston residents are already experiencing the health impacts of climate change, with some populations experiencing a disproportionate burden. The Boston Public Health Commission's Environmental and Occupational Division works with city departments, committees, and other agencies across the city to integrate climate change mitigation and resiliency efforts into programming and to incorporate health equity into policies and planning processes that shape the environment of the city. The Commission's Office of Public Health Preparedness also addresses climate change as it pertains to emergency situations and mass scale public health threats.

By **developing and structuring cross-sector relationships** (HiAP Strategy 1) and working with partners like the Boston Planning and Development Agency, the Office of Emergency Management, and the Water and Sewer Department, the City of Boston is aligned on the health impacts of climate change and

has a unified, strategic approach towards policy and planning. The Commission also participates in the planning committee of a cross-agency climate change adaption work group that consists of 20 members from as many city agencies. This work group is an important formal **accountability structure** (HiAP Strategy 7), giving members the opportunity to discuss and cross-connect on projects their departments are running. It brings together all the agencies working on climate change to **synchronize communications** (HiAP Strategy 6) by disseminating cohesive, simplified messaging to better serve residents. They often incorporate climate change messaging into outreach about associated public health topics as well.

"Every fall, we start putting out notices around carbon monoxide issues because the heavy winter storms are coming, and we don't want people being poisoned because they're trying to warm up their car in a closed garage...and there's a nod to climate change as part of that messaging. We do the same with storms in the spring when we message around flooding and mold or summer heat wave communication."

— Paul Shoemaker, Director, Environmental and Occupational Health Division, BPHC.

As BPHC works with other departments and agencies on climate change, the Commission focuses on environmental and health impacts through the lens of public health and health equity, as climate change results in unequal impact on different communities. This approach **incorporates health and health equity into decision-making** (HiAP Strategy 2) with partners in different fields with various priorities. Partners are very receptive to health-based messages, and this framework helps build stronger collaboration.

“One of our good partners in climate change work is our Water and Sewer Commission. ...They're coming at it as engineers a lot of times, you know, how do I keep the water from backing up into basements? So, if I'm using examples when I'm talking about health impacts of climate change of floodwaters and people's homes, or backups into basements and the mold growth that it causes and the health impacts that that mold causes, they're starting to see that tie together. It's not just about how many gallons a minute can we clear in storm water.”

— Paul Shoemaker, Director, Environmental and Occupational Health Division, BPHC.

Although many BPHC employees work to mitigate the impacts of climate change, there is no funding for a dedicated staff member to exclusively work on it. BPHC **enhances workforce capacity** (HiAP Strategy 3) by creating time and space for staff to join multi-sector meetings and include climate change as part of their work portfolio. To take this a step further, BPHC is currently taking stock of all climate initiatives in the city and aims to assess its various climate-related efforts to bring them under greater coordination. BPHC is also involved in a larger, longer-term process to improve data governance within BPHC to increase data accessibility across its programs. This **data sharing** (HiAP Strategy 5) within the diversified approach to climate change allows employees engaged in work impacted by climate change to take up the climate torch.



For more information on BPHC's approach to addressing the health impacts of climate change, please contact info@bphc.org or visit their [website](#).

Pima County Health Department: Laying the groundwork for a stronger climate change response



Background

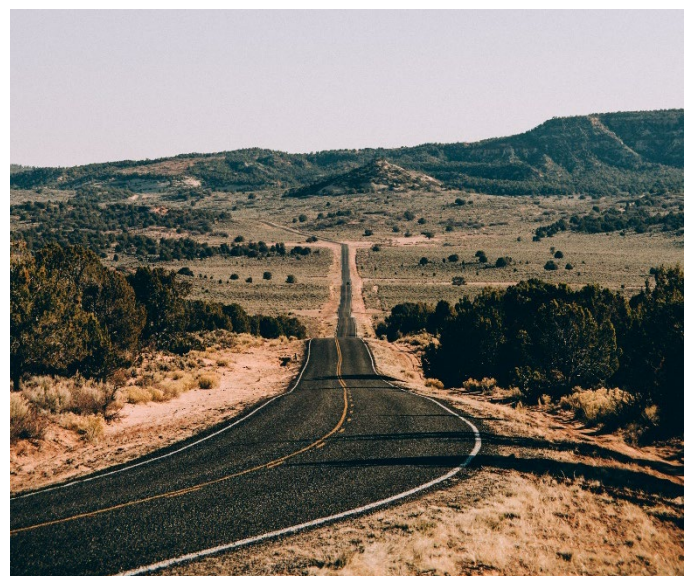
The Pima County Health Department (PCHD) is the designated public health authority responsible for preventing disease and promoting and protecting health and well-being in Pima County, Arizona. While 90% of the 1.04 million residents live in the Tucson area, most of the Pima County geography is rural and remote. It includes five incorporated jurisdictions, two Tribal Nations, and one large unincorporated area. PCHD employs roughly 500 employees. In 2021, PCHD was given the responsibility to coordinate the heat response of Pima County, in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management. PCHD also started the Office of Climate and Environmental Health Justice at the end of 2023. Their strategic priorities include assessing the climate impacts on health and enhancing planning, preparedness, and response for health-related consequences stemming from climate-amplified disaster.

Approach to Addressing Climate Change

PCHD understands that climate change cannot be solved by a single department, program, or office. Luckily, many PCHDs partners share the same foundational perspective and amplify each other's efforts. As the coordinator of the county heat response, PCHD serves a natural role as the convener of partners and has **developed and structured cross-sector relationships** (HiAP Strategy 1). They bring together disparate agencies to create a heat relief network that shares resources and information, and they collaborate with the city of Tucson, the state of Arizona, and academic and Tribal partners. They also participate in multi-sector collaborations, such as the county administrators' Climate Executive Action Team and the Joint Heat Action Team, which was spearheaded after a successful summit organized by the city of Tucson.

"We were lucky that the city of Tucson sponsored in early spring a Southern Arizona Heat Summit that kind of took its lead from a state heat summit that had happened earlier. Our city partners and the University of Arizona partners recognized we needed a locally focused conversation and workshop session. It was intended to be a space where people could come together and talk about planning and policy issues."

— Julie Robinson, Program Officer, Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, PCHD.



The health department also functions as a hub for the region and support for smaller neighboring counties with more limited resources. Through these formal and informal partnerships, PCHD has built strong **accountability structures** (HiAP Strategy 7). To **synchronize their communications** (HiAP Strategy 6), PCHD participates in a weekly joint key communications meeting, aligns their communication with partners such as the National Weather Service, and amplifies their partners' communications materials through their social media channels and website. They have put special effort into avoiding redundancies and aligning their communication around climate change with the county and the city of Tucson.

"That partnership [with the city of Tucson] for an aligned communications campaign is successful because...the city has access to some resources like our transportation system that sits within the city, not the county. So, you know, they can say, oh, we're going to get all these heat-related illness symptoms postcards that the health department created and put them on all of the city buses. That's not necessarily something that we could have done ourselves, but because we're aligned with the city, they're able to carry our message further."

— Kat Davis, Division Manager, Emergency Medication and preparedness, PCHD.

Lastly, PCHD successfully **coordinates funding and investments** (HiAP Strategy 4). For example, the Office of Climate and Environmental Health Justice (OCEHJ) was made possible when PCHD included it and the program officer position in the public health infrastructure grant through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The OCEHJ's goals are to improve collaborative planning and resource allocation, **integrate health into decision-making** (HiAP Strategy 2) to reduce the impact of extreme heat events through interventions, and foster community resilience. As such, it often serves as a climate science liaison and **integrates research, evaluation, and data systems** (HiAP Strategy 5) by working with their academic partners to avoid redundancies in research and developing a research map for all the moving pieces in the data field. By **enhancing their workforce** (HiAP Strategy 3) for climate change in these ways, PCHD and OCEHJ have been able to have a stronger influence when discussing climate change-related policy through the lens of public health.



For more information on how PCHD is addressing the health impacts of climate change, please reach out to them [here](#) or visit their [website](#).

New Orleans Health Department: How an investment in workforce can improve cross-sector collaboration



Background

The New Orleans Health Department (NOHD) is one of the oldest health departments in the country and has around 110 employees. For the past 126 years, their mission has been to promote, protect, and improve the health of everyone in their community through fair policies, programs, and partnerships. Over the years, NOHD has grown and expanded to address new and emerging risks to health. Being a coastal city, New Orleans has experienced health impacts from natural disasters. However, recent challenges have emerged with the changing climate, including intensification of storms, prolonged periods of extreme heat, and marsh fires. All these factors are expanding the ways in which the environment can affect human health. To address these emerging issues, the Public Health Emergencies and Environmental Health Unit of NOHD is working to enhance the systems, processes, and accountability mechanisms that impact the health of individuals with access and functional needs during emergencies. They also aid city employees and volunteers in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from acute and prolonged disasters to improve their contributions to city emergency functions.

Approach to Addressing Climate Change

NOHD has invested in **enhancing their workforce** (HiAP Strategy 3) by hiring a climate and health lead. This relatively new position aims to improve climate-related, community education and engagement efforts with the general public. NOHD also uses this new role to improve data management and presentation capabilities for climate and health topics. The new position helps NOHD to act as a climate ambassador for city departments and community organizations. The health department works with other city departments,

such as the Office for Resilience and Sustainability, to support infrastructure-based projects that mitigate climate change. When possible, NOHD and the Office for Resilience and Sustainability **coordinate funding** climate change. When possible, NOHD and the Office for Resilience and Sustainability **coordinate funding** (HiAP Strategy 4) by applying for intersecting grants. Hiring the climate and health lead made it possible for NOHD to be an active part in **developing and structuring cross-sector relationships** (HiAP Strategy 1).

“The health department previously lacked a dedicated individual focused on climate-related issues, which resulted in limited engagement in sustainability, climate change, and resiliency discussions. The creation of a climate and health position within the department was aimed at ensuring consistent representation in these critical conversations, while also integrating health considerations into decisions on the best strategies to enhance the city's resilience.”

— Sarah E. Baker, Climate and Health Lead, NOHD

NOHD also **integrates health into decision-making** (HiAP Strategy 2) in these partnerships by ensuring that their non-health sector partners consider the human impact. The health department understands the importance of making sure that partners like the Office for Resilience and Sustainability have the health data needed for their projects to properly assess the impacts of their infrastructure projects. That is why NOHD also has a strong focus on **integrating research, evaluation, and data systems** (HiAP Strategy 5) and ensures that partners have health data that support the work that they are doing. Currently, this approach focuses mostly on the impacts of extreme heat, but the health department is looking to expand this into air quality. Besides sharing data on health impacts, NOHD also identified opportunities to use non-health data from partners.

“... the Office of Homeland Security has 20 weather stations throughout the city. We’re also very interested in working on the hyperlocal scale to try and gauge health impacts because the city of New Orleans is very neighborhood oriented, and even though it is small, the landscape in different neighborhoods is not the same due to redlining, etc. So, we’re trying to figure out the best way to use these 20 weather stations to really shape our health guidance that we’re offering to the community.”

— Sarah E. Baker, Climate and Health Lead, NOHD

NOHD’s work with the state health department, combined with data from the coroner’s office and corresponding emergency medical services data, has led to a heat and health report that explored heat-related fatalities within New Orleans. This made it possible to look more in depth at the environmental characteristics associated with heat-related fatalities.

Lastly, NOHD **synchronizes their communication** (HiAP Strategy 6) with their partners by matching their partners’ communication efforts or by amplifying their work. NOHD also works with community partners to provide heat safety resources and to collaborate with the state health department to avoid redundancies in communication. NOHD has also started including additional climate-related topics in communication during preparedness events around hurricane season. Hiring the climate and health lead has created the opportunity to be more intentional about communications and has made it possible to start initiating widespread communication surrounding climate topics in the summer of 2024.



For more information on how NOHD is addressing the health impacts of climate change, please reach out to them [here](#) or visit their [website](#).



The National Connection for Local Public Health

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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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