

Typology of Climate and Health Models for Local Health Departments

A Primer to NACCHO's "A Guide to Climate and Health Programs"



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Coming Soon



Introduction

Local health departments (LHDs) have a variety of opportunities to make meaningful and substantive contributions to climate resilience action in their jurisdictions.

The National Association of County and City Health Officials' Climate Change Policy defines the importance of climate action by local health authorities and provides a framework for climate and health work aligned with the *10 Essential Public Health Services* (NACCHO, 2021). In addition, NACCHO has outlined essential actions for local health authorities to begin examining and addressing the local health impacts of climate change (NACCHO, 2018).

This brief is a primer to NACCHO's upcoming "A Guide to Climate and Health Programs." The primer complements and expands on NACCHO's vision, presenting four specific models for climate and health programs within LHDs.

Defining a Climate and Health Program

A “Climate and Health Program” is an organizational structure that builds public health department capacity to:

- Adapt programs and services to prepare for and respond to climate stressors.
- Bring a health and equity framework to interdepartmental and cross-sectoral climate resilience actions.

Intradepartmental Coordination: Climate change and related extreme weather events have significant, cascading, and inequitable health impacts (Balbus et al., 2016). These health impacts disproportionately burden populations most exposed to the hazard, most sensitive to that exposure, and least likely to have the economic, political, and social resources to prepare or respond (APHA & CDC, 2021).

As climate change will inevitably affect all public health programs, LHDs must adapt and plan on incorporating climate change preparedness into existing programmatic work. Collaboration among programs within an LHD will make climate and health adaptation more effective, efficient, sustainable, and scalable over time.

Interdepartmental and Cross-Sectoral Coordination: Another challenge for LHDs is that the actions necessary to address these health impacts are also interdepartmental and cross-sectoral in scope (U.S. EPA, 2022). Adaptations are needed across the built and natural environment, clinical services and other public health services, and emergency preparedness and response actions. In addition, the work must center equity, environmental justice, and community resilience.

With dedicated resources, LHDs are well positioned to lead or support the design, communication, implementation, and evaluation of interdepartmental and cross-sectoral climate adaptation efforts. This work can take many forms as well as contract or expand based on available resources, but public health involvement can ensure that climate action is data-driven, people-centered, equitable, and effective (Rudolph et al., 2018).

Climate and Health Models for Local Health Departments

CLIMATE AND HEALTH CHAMPION

Someone in the health department who coordinates climate and health-related actions in addition to their day-to-day assigned job duties.

CLIMATE AND HEALTH COMMITTEE

A standing climate change-focused committee with representatives from different public health programs.

CLIMATE AND HEALTH COORDINATOR

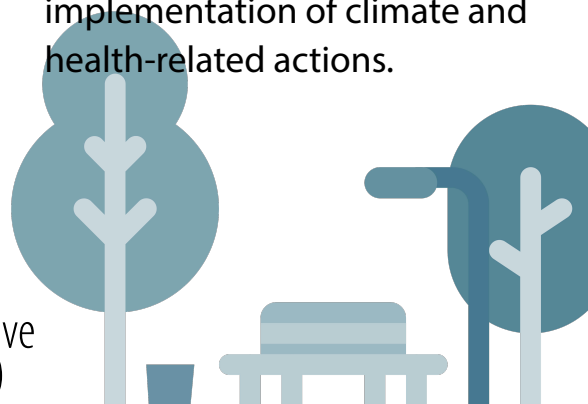
A dedicated Coordinator with or without support staff that plans, designs, and implements climate and health-related actions.

FULL CLIMATE AND HEALTH PROGRAM

A dedicated Climate and Health Coordinator, support staff, *and* Climate and Health Committee from throughout the health department's different programs and services collaborating together on the planning, design, and implementation of climate and health-related actions.

Less Resource Intensive
(staffing, time, cost)

More Resource Intensive
(staffing, time, cost)



Climate and Health Champion

A Climate and Health Champion is a public health employee who coordinates the LHD's climate and health-related actions in addition to their normal, assigned job duties. A Climate and Health Champion often works in an area of the LHD particularly impacted by climate change and is motivated by the need to prepare for, and respond to, these impacts.

The actual work of a Climate and Health Champion depends largely on where they sit in the LHD, but often includes advocacy, coalition-building, and grant-writing.

The Climate and Health Champion represents an important first step to building LHD capacity to initiate and collaborate on climate-related actions.



- **Coordinates** with other public health programs on specific climate-related actions that are aligned with their own programmatic duties. For example, a Climate and Health Champion from Environmental Health Services may work with the Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response and Chronic Disease groups to integrate climate preparedness messaging into an asthma home visiting program.
- **Increases** resources for climate adaptation such as: applying for state, federal, academic, or philanthropic climate and health funding; advocating to public health leadership for dedicated climate change staff; or recruiting new Climate and Health Champions.
- **Participates** in climate workgroups or other collaborative climate-related initiatives outside the LHD.
- **Joins** local, regional, or national climate and health communities of practice.

Climate and Health Committee

A Climate and Health Committee centralizes climate change-related actions in the LHD as a standing, official work group. While the work of a Climate and Health Committee depends largely on the interests and capacity of its members, the Committee is generally a space for: high-level strategic planning; situational awareness about the many ways that the LHD engages on climate-related actions; and sharing data and best practices. **The Climate and Health Committee is an opportunity to build a cross-programmatic coalition that encompasses and supports the many climate-related activities that are already happening in the LHD.**

Staff



Comprised of many part-time (up to 5-10% time) staff members from throughout the LHD's different programs and services. The staff assigned to the committee may either be Climate and Health Champions or have climate change as a limited part of their job description. The Climate and Health Committee has regular meetings and may be attended by LHD leadership.

Cost



Low cost.



Climate and Health Committee Contd.

Example Actions

- **Increasing** situational awareness of existing climate-related actions that are occurring within the LHD, citywide, countywide, or regionally.
 - Sharing resources such as emergency preparedness and response plans, climate-related data analysis, local or regional best practices, grant opportunities, current events, or other existing actions.
- **Coordinating** engagement with existing climate-related actions that are occurring within the LHD, citywide, countywide, or regionally.
 - Reviewing and commenting on climate action plans, climate adaptation plans, and other structural planning documents.
 - Triaging actions that need public health engagement to the most appropriate program for follow-up.
- **Strategic planning** and other high-level visioning exercises that can largely take place during committee meetings.



Climate and Health Coordinator

This model centralizes the LHD's engagement on climate change as a budgeted program distinct from other LHD programs. The work of the Climate and Health Coordinator is to facilitate the design and implementation of climate actions through research and analysis, evaluation, long-range planning and coordination, and grant-writing. **The Climate and Health Coordinator position represents a long-term and consistent commitment to climate-related health impacts as a department priority.**

Staff



At least one full-time position dedicated to climate-related public health actions without any roles or responsibilities unrelated to climate and health. The Climate and Health Coordinator may sit in any part of the LHD and may supervise staff (full-time or part-time) who support their work. A sample team may look like:

- **Lead: Climate and Health Coordinator** supported by:
 - **Climate and Health Epidemiologist** to develop climate vulnerability assessments, establish hazard-specific surveillance, and manage climate and health-related research.
 - **Climate and Health Interdepartmental Planner** to work with other agencies to bring a health and equity perspective to interdepartmental climate sustainability and adaptation actions.
 - **Climate and Health Outreach Coordinator** to work with community-based organizations and local advocacy groups to support their climate and health actions.

Climate and Health Coordinator Contd.



Cost

Medium cost.

Example Actions

- **Representing** the LHD on citywide, countywide, or regional climate change adaptation and climate change mitigation initiatives (i.e., climate action plans, hazard mitigation plans, general plans). Ensuring these processes are informed by climate and health and health equity data and the social determinants of health.
- **Developing** climate and health vulnerability assessments, tracking health impacts of extreme weather events, evaluating actions, creating maps and other public data tools, and performing other research actions.
- **Supporting** community health needs assessments, developing climate and health adaptation plans, and other planning and policy documents to adapt programs and services to climate stressors.
- **Tracking and applying** for grants and other funding opportunities.





Full Climate and Health Program

The full Climate and Health Program includes elements from the Climate and Health Committee and Climate and Health Coordinator. Through consistent two-way communication between the Climate and Health Coordinator and LHD subject matter experts, the work of the full Climate and Health Program includes research, planning and coordination, and implementation of new actions to prepare for, or respond to, climate-related health impacts. **This model not only centralizes governance of climate actions, but also builds capacity throughout the department for federalized climate and health work to adapt services to respond to climate stressors.**



At least one full-time Climate and Health Coordinator *and* many part-time (up to 5-10% time) staff from throughout the LHD's different programs and services.



High cost.

Full Climate and Health Program Contd.

Example Actions

All actions outlined for the Climate and Health Committee and Climate and Health Coordinator models and:

- **Utilizing** resources and expertise of various public health programs, such as Environmental Health Services, Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response, Behavioral Health, Policy and Planning, and Clinical Services, to effectively transition plans into actionable implementation.
- **Connecting** citywide, countywide, or regional climate actions with the appropriate LHD stakeholders necessary to support and scale that action.
- **Monitoring and evaluating** the impact of implemented climate and health actions, including the collection and analysis of relevant data to inform future strategies and interventions.
- **Advocating** for policies and initiatives that prioritize the intersection of climate change and public health, aiming to enhance resilience and mitigate health risks associated with climate change.
- **Staying updated** on the latest research and best practices in the field of climate and health, continuously informing and evolving the program's strategies and approaches.



Citations

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Coming Soon

This brief is a preview of NACCHO's upcoming "A Guide to Climate and Health Programs" which will be released in 2024. The complete guide complements and expands on NACCHO's vision, presenting the typology of climate and health program models along a continuum of increasing scope and resources. The guide will connect each model with possible staffing structures and examples of climate and health actions; and will present opportunities and challenges unique to each model across the domains of cost, sustainability, programmatic scope, and process scope. The purpose of these models is to provide a framework for local health departments establishing a climate and health program for the first time or building capacity for an existing one.

More resources on addressing the health impacts of climate change and what local health departments are doing can be found on NACCHO's website at www.naccho.org/climate-change.

