

Climate Change Demonstration Site: Imperial County (CA) Public Health Department



NAME OF DEMONSTRATION SITE:

Imperial County (CA) Public Health Department

NAME OF DEMONSTRATION SITE PROJECT:

Imperial County Public Health Department Climate Change Project

Project Summary

The Imperial County Public Health Department (ICPHD) Climate Change Project had both an internal and external focus. The planning and implementation of the internal and external activities took place concurrently to maximize outcomes.

The internal focus of the project was to develop ICPHD's capacity to meet the challenge of climate change, specifically to begin incorporating climate change concepts and key messages into public health programs. To do this, the project did the following:

- Completed an abbreviated internal self-assessment process using the National Association of County and City Health Officials' (NACCHO's) Local Health Department Self-Assessment Tool. The assessment process was completed by the Office of the Director and a selected group from each of ICPHD's divisions (Community Health, Environmental Health, and Support Services). Each division's deputy director facilitated the self-assessment process; at least two meetings occurred for information sharing and collecting.
- Completed an internal self-assessment process that focused on the 10 Essential Services of Public Health, using a climate change framework. This process was completed in a way similar to the abbreviated internal self-assessment process using the NACCHO Local Health Department Self-Assessment Tool. The purpose of this activity was to encourage ICPHD staff to think about current projects/programs, day-to-day activities, and upcoming efforts or activities that may fall within a climate change-focused framework.

- Completed a staff training titled "Climate Change and Public Health: A Primer." The training included background on climate change science, what climate change is, the health effects of climate change, the 10 Essential Services of Public Health, and steps for moving forward.
- Facilitated the participation of ICPHD staff in the American Public Health Association's webinar called "Looking Ahead: Advancing the Public Health Response." As part of this training, a climate change webinar survey was developed and executed to assess the knowledge of ICPHD staff following the webinar.
- Completed the *Imperial County Public Health Department Climate Change Adaptation Program: A Primer* document, which was ICPHD's first attempt at a climate change-related strategic planning document.

The external focus of the project was to develop and strengthen collaborations with community members, organizations, and agencies. To accomplish this, ICPHD convened the Imperial Valley Climate-focused Coalition. The charge of this coalition was, in partnership with ICPHD, to begin to identify and prioritize climate change-focused projects and activities that would be beneficial for coalition members to pursue. To accomplish these goals, the program organized the first Imperial Valley Climate-focused Coalition meeting. Attendees represented several outside agencies including the following:

- Imperial County Fire Chief;
- *Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo* (Community Clinic Network);
- Department of Agriculture;
- Health Resources and Services Agency; and
- Housing and Urban Development.

The initial meeting was a success, providing a platform to discuss what was currently happening regarding climate change and health, what tools or resources communities might need to identify and address climate change-focused activities, and what other agencies and key stakeholders the coalition needed to include.

[FACT SHEET]

July 2012



Project Outcomes

Overall, ICPHD met all project objectives and accomplished the following:

- Conducted an internal needs assessment process using NACCHO's Local Health Department Self-Assessment Tool and the 10 Essential Services of Public Health, within a climate change framework;
- Convened the Imperial Valley Climate-focused Coalition; and
- Completed *Imperial County Public Health Department Climate Change Adaptation Program: A Primer*.

Lessons Learned

- ICPHD and sister agencies are interested and ready to begin discussions on how to begin planning and incorporating climate change-focused messages and strategies into day-to-day activities within ICPHD and other local governmental agencies' policies;
- Maintaining momentum is important to keep local projects and efforts moving forward;
- Community members, organizations, and agencies may be at very different places along the climate change and health "continuum." Thus, local health departments (LHDs) should spend sufficient time providing information that builds a solid understanding of and foundation for everyone involved in the climate-change activities;
- Engage with other LHDs that are familiar with and have participated in similar projects;
- Connect with state, private, and federal resources (e.g., state department of public health, foundations, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, state associations of local public health directors) to request technical assistance, case study documents, and any other type of resources that may be helpful in completing a similar project; and
- Be open to innovative and non-traditional ideas and strategies to bring the LHD and key stakeholders together to work on a climate change-focused project.

Stories from the Field

- Following the ICPHD staff training, several staff members identified ways to incorporate climate change and health key messages and strategies into their respective programs.

- During the beginning of the first Imperial Valley Climate-focused Coalition meeting, attending coalition members seemed unclear about the purpose of and their role in climate and health. By the end of the coalition meeting, each agency's members understood both the larger connection and also a more agency-specific connection to climate change.

Project Sustainability and Capacity Building

Activities for this project will be maintained once funding has ended by incorporating activities into existing public health programs, including them in new and upcoming public health programs, and building climate change and health into LHD policies. These actions will be facilitated by periodic staff refresher trainings, convening and reconvening of the Imperial Valley Climate-focused Coalition, and round table meetings of LHD staff and other key stakeholders to discuss current issues, timely topics, and future directions.

ICPHD intends to build its capacity to address health impacts of climate change by continuing to look internally at public health programs and identifying how to incorporate climate change-focused messages and strategies into existing programs/projects. The LHD will develop strategies and messages that are cross-cutting and can be applied to a variety of public health programs and projects.

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