

Local Health Departments are Preparing for the Health Impacts of Climate Change

October 2017

Austin Public Health

Project Summary

The National Association of County and City Health Officials, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), selected Austin Public Health (TX) as one of 11 local health departments (LHDs) to better understand how city and county health departments are preparing for the health impacts of climate change. The goal of this project was to highlight local efforts to prepare for and build resiliency to the health impacts of climate change and to share these success stories to support new and ongoing initiatives in other LHDs. The program sought to identify best practices and provide real-world case studies. LHDs play an important role in connecting health impacts with the effects of climate change. This project highlights only a few of the many departments actively engaged in climate change efforts.

Background

The City of Austin, located in Travis County, TX, lies along the Edwards Plateau at the edge of the Great Plains. The Colorado River winds through the county from west to east, forming a series of man-made lakes. According to the latest population estimates, 1.2 million people live in Travis County,¹ nearly 80% of whom reside in the City of Austin; this reflects a 17% growth rate since the 2010 Census.

Climate Challenge

Austin Public Health oversees the public health services of the residents in Travis County, including the City of Austin. Successfully preparing for environmental events associated with climate change, such as extreme heat, flooding, and extreme weather evacuees, will require leveraging public health and emergency management infrastructure to coordinate adaptation and mitigation interventions. In particular, the increasing growth rate in the county can have significant environmental and public health consequences, increasing the urgency to respond to climate change.

Goal

Austin Public Health is addressing the health impacts of climate change by increasing climate change coordination and capacity building through community engagement to enhance environmental public health in its jurisdiction. The health department developed several objectives to address this overarching goal and has achieved a number of successes so far.



OBJECTIVES

- Build on the research and analysis from the Climate Change Projections project;²
- Provide internal training on climate change and the health department's role in local climate change initiatives;
- Increase the knowledge base of LHDs and all community partners regarding the public health and long-term consequences of climate change;
- Expand surveillance activities initiated during the Environmental Health Indicators Project both within the Health Department and in surrounding counties; and
- Convene a steering committee to identify capacity and funding needs.



Achievements and Successes

- Celebrated 10 years of leadership on the front lines of climate change in February 2017;
- Developed a toolkit of educational materials, tips, and resources for community action;³ and
- Developed a Community Climate Plan for communications and outreach that (1) engaged 5,000 people through online discussions, community events, and group presentations; and (2) reached 500,000 people with educational content about climate change and how to take action through digital and advertising platforms.

References

1. United States Census Bureau. Quick Facts webpage. Retrieved September 13, 2017, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216>
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3. Austin Texas Office of Sustainability. (2012). Climate Change Program. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <http://austintexas.gov/climate>

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NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health



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.

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