

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

October 2017

# New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

### Project Summary



The National Association of County and City Health Officials, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), selected the New York City Department of Health and Mental

Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) 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 project 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

Home to 8.5 million people, New York City is the most populated city in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Of this very diverse population, 20.6% live in poverty. Densely populated within 302.6 square land miles (27,000 people per square mile), the city sits at the mouth of where the Hudson River feeds into the Atlantic Ocean. NYC DOHMH serves vulnerable populations, service and healthcare providers, and policymakers. NYC DOHMH is one of the largest public health agencies in the world, with an annual budget of \$1.6 billion and more than 6,000 employees.

### Climate Challenge

Scientists predict that New York City will face numerous challenges related to climate change (e.g., heat waves, rising sea levels, flooding, storm surge, poor air quality), all with interrelated health impacts (e.g., heat-related illness and death, asthma and allergies, vector-borne diseases, food- and water-related illnesses, mental health and stress-related disorders). The

department is preparing to respond to the health impacts of climate change by understanding health impacts of current and future climate hazards; identifying vulnerable populations and disparities; and examining challenges to climate health resiliency.

### Goal

NYC DOHMH is addressing the challenges of climate change by understanding current and future health impacts of climate or climate-related hazards and developing interventions and adaptations to reduce and prevent those impacts. The health department developed several objectives to address this overarching goal and has achieved a number of successes so far.



### OBJECTIVES

- Inform citywide climate change adaptation, mitigation, and resiliency planning efforts with partner agencies;
- Continue to assess the health impacts of hot and cold weather and power outages;
- Provide situational awareness and contextualization of health risks during extreme heat emergencies;
- Characterize disparities of climate-related health impacts; and
- Develop strategies to enhance community resiliency in New York City communities with higher levels of risk inequities.

## Achievements and Successes

- Integrated a public health lens to citywide planning related to resiliency and sustainability;<sup>2-4</sup>
- Worked with local National Weather Service office to lower criteria for issuing a heat advisory in the city based on an assessment of health risks and inform messaging of heat-health risks by media;
- Based on findings from focus groups and a heat-health behavior survey, developed the “Be A Buddy” outreach campaign to encourage service and healthcare providers and social contacts to check on at-risk clients, family, and neighbors; and
- Developed a Heat Vulnerability Index with researchers at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health to describe neighborhood-level vulnerability to heat in the city.<sup>5</sup>

## References

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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.

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