

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

October 2017

Public Health – Seattle and King County

Project Summary



The National Association of County and City Health Officials, with funding from the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), selected Public Health – Seattle and King County as one of 11 local health departments (LHDs) to better understand how county and city health officials 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

King County, WA, is the 14th most populous county in the United States, with 1.93 million people.⁵ Covering 2,134 rural and urban square miles, King County is home to two tribal nations, 39 cities, 130 special purpose districts, and over 150 spoken languages. It is also home to one of the most diverse zip codes and one of the most diverse school districts in the nation.^{2,3} Almost one quarter of residents speak a language other than English and almost one-fifth of residents were born in another country. Although deemed one of the healthiest counties nationally, there is significant disparity in life expectancy, years of

Reports indicate that climate change in Washington will likely lead to larger numbers of heat-related injuries and deaths and that the greater Seattle area in particular can expect substantial mortality during future heat events.

healthy life, and levels of education and causes of death across geographic and racial groups. Public Health – Seattle and King County (PHSKC) is a large metropolitan health department with approximately 1,500 employees, 40 sites, and a budget of \$318 million that serves all county residents. PHSKC’s mission is to identify and promote the conditions under which all people can live within healthy communities and achieve optimum health.

Climate Challenge

King County is situated in the unique geography and climate of the Pacific Northwest and the Puget Sound Region. In 2009 and 2013, the University of Washington’s Climate Impacts Group released reports describing the serious health impacts that climate change will have on Puget Sound residents.^{4,5} These reports indicate that climate change in Washington will likely lead to larger numbers of heat-related injuries and deaths and that the greater Seattle area in particular can expect substantial mortality during future heat events. The reports document other

OBJECTIVES

- Implement an engagement process with both internal (PHSKC and other governmental partners’ leadership and staff) and external (community-based organizations and community leaders) stakeholders to solicit input and create ownership;
- Draft a climate and public health framework based on the findings from the engagement process with stakeholders; and
- Implement a communication strategy to raise awareness about climate change and health, and share the framework broadly with organizational and community partners.



adverse effects, including more severe and frequent weather events, increased vector-, water-, and foodborne diseases, increased allergies and asthma, and increased social impacts that will affect the public's health.

Goal

Currently, PHSKC is working to develop a climate and public health framework for public health that reflects the values, concerns, and priorities of the local community and public health staff. The health department developed several objectives to address this overarching goal and has achieved a number of successes so far.

Achievements and Successes

- Participated in the Public Health Institute's Center for Climate Change and Health learning collaborative with 12 other local health jurisdictions;
- Partnered with two local climate justice-oriented community-based organizations to inform this work and to ensure that equity and social justice are at the core of the process and the final version of the framework;
- Conducted interviews with departmental leadership and community stakeholders on what they perceive as the role of PHSKC related to climate change mitigation and preparedness;

- Integrated public health considerations into King County's Strategic Climate Action Plan; and
- Established a voice for public health impacts of climate change in the region.

References

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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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