

Call for Stories from City Leaders about Working at the Intersection of Climate and Health

Overview

Effects of changes in climate, such as sea level rise in coastal areas, have important implications for the public's health and well-being in the U.S. Local leaders, including many U.S. mayors, have pledged action to work across sectors and ensure that communities are more prepared, resilient, and sustainable. Several cities have already demonstrated progress by working at the intersection of climate and health through innovative and strategic initiatives, while others have encountered political, technical, or economic challenges. By documenting stories about effective approaches and barriers to implementing new policies or programs to address climate and health, and bringing leaders together to discuss solutions, cities will be better equipped to overcome challenges when tackling these issues in their communities.

The Health Impact Project (the Project), a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew), will interview city leaders, such as mayors, deputy mayors, resilience or sustainability officers, and others who are implementing policies that use evidence to intentionally and simultaneously address climate and public health. The goal is to identify barriers and highlight promising strategies, particularly in small to medium sized cities (pop. below 500,000). The Project will share several of these conversations in a "Q&A" series on healthimpactproject.org and develop other public materials detailing learnings, as appropriate.

The Project will subsequently develop a funding opportunity to provide grants to cities that have faced impediments to following through with climate pledges and are interested in adapting or replicating successful approaches identified through the interviews. More information about this funding opportunity is forthcoming in late 2018. The Project will also facilitate peer mentorship and networking to share knowledge. Throughout the initiative, the Project will leverage the RWJF and Pew communications channels and platforms to highlight local efforts at the intersection of climate and health. By reaching other local elected officials and government agencies, community-based organizations, and others, the Project will increase awareness of evidence-driven strategies that simultaneously address climate impacts and health.

Background

Impacts such as extreme heat, storms and flooding, increased air pollutants, increase in disease vectors, and disruption to food supply, can have direct and indirect effects on the physical, social, and psychological health of humansⁱ. Health care system data reveal that emergency room visits for heat-related illnesses increased by 133% between 1997 and 2006.ⁱⁱ

Health effects vary by regional vulnerabilities such as geographic conditions and built environment factors. For example, death rates spiked during heat waves in St. Louis and Philadelphia, while risks of waterborne illness resulting from heavy rain and rising water temperatures are expected to increase in the Great Lakes region.ⁱⁱⁱ Social and economic factors also affect vulnerability of populations facing these impacts such as existing health threats and economic stability.^{iv}

The cumulative impact of these factors and conditions could result in significant economic burdens for the U.S.^v Over the last decade the federal government incurred direct costs of more than \$350 billion as a result of extreme weather and fire events alone.^{vi}

How to Get Involved

We invite mayoral offices and/or local agencies, on behalf of the mayor, to submit a two-page letter expressing interest to healthimpactproject@pewtrusts.org. Letters should describe how the community has

changed as a result of leadership on climate and health issues and/or share information about the impediments to acting at the intersection of climate and health (as well as possible solutions). Letters should answer questions such as:

- What is the main success and/or challenge that your city has faced in working at the intersection of climate and health? What factors or conditions led to the success or created the challenge?
- What changes and metrics or indicators were used to measure health and/or improvement in social determinants of health? Who benefited (or who will benefit) and how?
- What barriers does the city face to working effectively at the intersection of climate and health? What would be needed to remove them and are there possible solutions in progress?
- What guidance would you offer another city seeking to improve community health and address climate issues through similar efforts as yours?

Key Dates and Details

- June 22, 2018: Letters of interest due to healthimpactproject@pewtrusts.org.
- Mid-July, 2018: The Project will review letters and contact select city leaders to participate in a phone call or in-person interview. Selected leaders will represent diverse examples in terms of geography, city size by population, political context and affiliation, and sectors related to a changing climate such as energy, agriculture, housing, and transportation.
- Summer 2018: The Project will conduct the interviews and publish the Q&A series.
- Fall 2018: The Project will disseminate information about the funding opportunity and issue grants for cities to support the adaptation or replication of successful approaches and address challenges.
- Date to be determined based on participant availability: The Project will convene Q&A series participants and grantees to share knowledge and create a peer network of leaders interested in discussing solutions to tackle climate and health issues in their communities.

ⁱ <https://www.climatecommunication.org/affects/human-health/>

ⁱⁱ https://medsocietiesforclimatehealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/gmu_medical_alert_updated_082417.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/highlights/report-findings/human-health>

^{iv} <https://health2016.globalchange.gov/populations-concern>

^v <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-720>

^{vi} <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/accountingcosts.pdf>