



Strengthening Community Networks: New Orleans Health Department

New Orleans (NOLA)—a city of 350,000—sits near the mouth of the Mississippi River and the edge of the Gulf of Mexico. In recent years, NOLA has seen clearly the worsening impacts of climate change, including Hurricane Katrina, extreme heat events, and increasing mosquito populations, but only recently has the New Orleans Health Department (NOHD) more proactively addressed the impacts of climate change on health.

NOHD used a CDC framework (BRACE) and consulted with local and state climatologists to understand climate change projections and associated health impacts, focusing on heat, vectors, and air quality. NOHD staff then compiled and mapped climate vulnerability and health risk to identify neighborhoods most vulnerable to the adverse health impacts of climate change. This provided the foundation for further engagement with NOHD staff (including a training on climate and health for over 75 staff), other City agencies and community based organizations interested in climate resilience and equity in NOLA.

NOHD partnered with the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy (GCCLP) to host three community meetings in neighborhoods identified by the climate and health vulnerability assessment as most vulnerable. The overall goal of the meetings was to build community capacity to take community-led action on climate change to improve health and equity. The meetings were structured to: 1) map participants' knowledge of GNOs' extreme weather response protocol; 2) communicate impacts of climate change on health; 3) identify community health service needs and prioritize community action steps that address the intersection of climate and health; 4) strengthen participants' ability for increased civic participation; and 5) collect and deliver community recommendations to address the impact of climate change on health in at-risk communities in New Orleans.

After the meetings, GCCLP shared recommendations with NOHD:

- Build trust, in light of residents' concerns about how well the City will protect them in a climate-related disaster—based on the Katrina experience.
- Invest in community cohesion by supporting neighborhood groups with physical, financial, and educational resources and strengthening community networks to equip communities to bounce back from extreme weather events.

The vulnerability assessment and community meetings informed the development of a draft NOHD Climate Adaptation Plan, and NOHD participation in drafting the New Orleans [Climate Action Plan](#), which addresses climate mitigation strategies with health benefits, such as active transportation.⁸¹ The New Orleans Community Health Needs Assessment and the Community Health Improvement Plan also now include—under the goal to “Create social and physical environments that promote good health for all”—an objective to “reduce the impact of climate change on the health of New Orleans communities and vulnerable populations.”

“The climate and health vulnerability assessment and the community meetings really gave health a seat at the table and provided so many others with the information they needed to understand not just how climate change affects health but why people and health have to be at the center of climate resilience.”

– Sarah Babcock, NOHD Health Population and Planning Manager

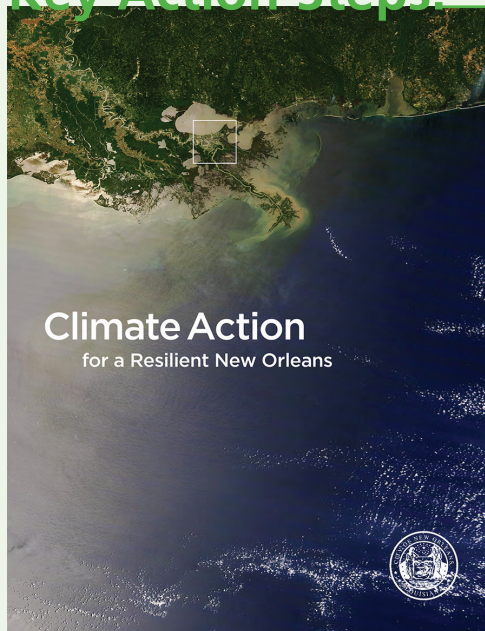
Future Work and Lessons Learned

NOHD now plans to augment available data on heat illness and heat vulnerability through collaborating with a local CBO to collect temperature data from sensors placed in neighborhoods facing health inequities and built environments that foster urban heat islands. Additionally, NOHD will expand and update its heat outreach campaign, and continue in the role of front-line responder to climate-related disasters.

For More Information

- [Climate Changes Health Overview](#) – New Orleans Department of Health⁸²

Key Action Steps:



- Work with local and state agencies to compile climate and health data to develop a climate and health vulnerability assessment.
- Support community based organizations to inform communities about climate and health risks and provide input on community priorities to local government agencies. representative of the vulnerable populations identified in the CHEVA to identify the appropriate approach to engaging with that community.
 - o Compensate CBO partners, provide meals, childcare, and compensate community members for their time and contributions.
- Collaborate with LHD partners to include climate change impacts into existing planning processes.