



From Collaboration to Action: Philadelphia Department of Public Health

Philadelphia is a sprawling city with a diverse population (42% African American) of over 1.5 million people. Philadelphia city government developed its first climate action plan in 2007. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) participated in the greenhouse gas inventory, but only more recently has it addressed more explicitly the human health impacts of climate change.

In early 2016, PDPH convened its first Climate Change and Health Advisory Group (CCHAG) with over 34 representatives from a diverse array of community-based organizations, health care systems, local and regional government agencies, and academic partners. CCHAG established a unique space for diverse stakeholders to learn from one another and prioritize collaborative action to address climate, health, and equity. Participants identified several priorities, including asthma, extreme heat, and flooding, and an overarching concern about climate impacts on Philadelphia's most vulnerable communities.

A CCHAG Asthma subcommittee compiled data and maps to identify zip codes with high asthma emergency room use. PDPH and CCHAG member Asociacion de Puertorriquenos en Marcha developed culturally competent materials for patients and service providers about the impact of climate change on asthma, and strategies to reduce asthma risks in a changing climate. Materials were disseminated by Drexel University, the Clean Air Council, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, the National Nurse-Led Care Consortium, Temple's Health Homes program, the Philadelphia School District, and others. The CCHAG Asthma Subcommittee met with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and U.S. Forest Service to explore how urban greening programs could integrate considerations of the rising risks of allergy due to the impacts of climate change on pollen levels.

PHPP also launched an Extreme Heat Workgroup with the Office of Emergency Management to review the City's Excessive Heat Plan. In partnership with graduate students at a local university, PDPH developed a heat vulnerability index and maps of vulnerable neighborhoods. An update of the City's Excessive Heat Plan— informed by projected increases in summer temperatures and more intense heat events of longer duration— addresses the disproportionate impacts of heat on vulnerable residents with strategies such as activating cooling centers and spraygrounds that are accessible to neighborhoods where risk for adverse health outcomes is higher. Agencies agreed to redesign heat warnings so that all city agencies use the same language—“heat health warning” and “heat health emergency”—so that residents more clearly understand the level of risk. During heat health emergencies, the City requires that residential utility shutoffs are stopped, and may dispatch [mobile heat health teams to high-risk neighborhoods](#).

The PHPP team also collaborated with the Franklin Institute to integrate discussions of heat health risks and vulnerabilities into an innovative demonstration of how typical climate effects and mitigation strategies impacts temperature in classic-style Philadelphia row houses.

Climate Urban Systems Partnership

The [Climate Urban Systems Partnership](#) (CUSP) is a collaborative project funded by the National Science Foundation to explore novel approaches to community climate education in four cities. In Philadelphia, CUSP and PDPH worked with the Franklin Institute to conduct community workshops on climate change, extreme heat, and health in summer of 2017, using the row house demonstrations. Following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, PDPH worked with its partners to map flood-vulnerable areas and held community workshops to discuss flood vulnerability and resilience strategies. In 2018, CUSP will host additional community workshops focused on climate change, severe storms and flooding, and health.

Future Work and Lessons Learned

PDPH—in collaboration with the Mayor’s Office of Sustainability—will use the heat vulnerability maps to identify high-risk neighborhoods and work with community based organizations to prioritize and implement interventions to reduce urban heat, including cool roofs, green space, and better access to cooling centers and spraygrounds. PDPH will continue to work with the CCHAG and many diverse stakeholders who together have demonstrated the power of robust partnerships to advance efforts to improve community climate resilience.

For More Information

- [Growing Stronger: Toward a Climate Ready Philadelphia](#)

Key Action Steps:



- Identify key stakeholders and form a Climate Change and Health Advisory Group (CCHAG) with CBOs, local government agencies, health care providers, and academic partners, to prioritize strategies and solutions
- Support local CBOs to develop culturally appropriate materials on climate and health and conduct community workshops
- Partner with local academic institutions to assess and map climate vulnerability.