

Raising Awareness About Climate Change: San Luis Obispo Department of Public Health

The San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Health (SLO-PHD) launched their climate change and health communication campaign—*OutsideIn SLO: We Take Health and Climate Change Personally*—in 2014, in collaboration with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH).

Integrating climate change into other LHD programs

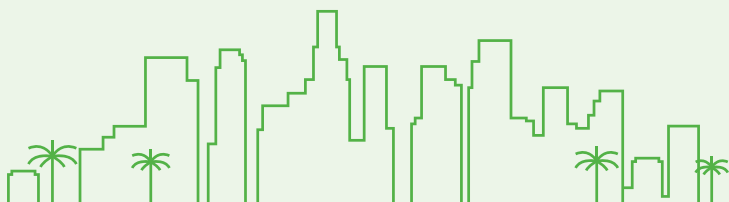
First, staff from health department programs (Public Health Nursing, Emergency Preparedness, and Environmental Health) were trained about the health impacts of climate change. Because women and children are particularly vulnerable to climate change, the SLO-PHD Health Promotion Division partnered with the Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to produce a climate change curriculum that could be integrated into WIC classes. The 20-minute class, taught in English and Spanish by a dietician or public health educator, reached about 1400 families in 2014–2015 and over 1000 families in 2016. Although SLO-PHD attempted to evaluate whether the class impacted behavior, the response rate was too low to reach a firm conclusion.

“We asked if the WIC clients thought climate change was an issue. They weren’t surprised about it and they were very accepting of the information. We found that Latinos were more aware and more knowledgeable going into it than the White population—most likely because of the drought. Many of the Latino families here have relatives in the Central Valley so they were dealing with layoffs, with drought, with no water in their homes, with food prices going up, and so it wasn’t like, ‘Oh, now we are going to talk about some random topic in our nutrition class.’”

*Kathleen Karle, Division Manager—Health Promotion,
San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Health*

SLO-PHD also worked with a marketing firm to develop fact sheets on energy efficiency, climate-friendly travel, and eating locally grown fruits and vegetables. Distribution channels included farmer’s markets, community meetings, social media, and radio advertisements. In Summer 2017, SLO-PHD partnered with CDPH to host webinars on communicating climate change as a public health issue. The [webinar series](#) explored climate change and health storytelling, adaptation planning, health equity, and developing curricula.

SLO-PHD is now integrating climate change into its reviews of the potential health impacts of projects under review by the county Planning department. The [Healthy Communities Work Group](#), addresses the health and climate benefits (or risks) of the projects.



“We talked to a lot of staff who saw climate change as an issue but at first had a harder time connecting it to health. Once we started the conversation, they were totally on board with looking at the health co-benefits and integrated messaging.”

*Morgan Feld, Community Wellness
Health Education Specialist*

Lessons and Next Steps

While senior management is very supportive of the OutsideIn SLO campaign, limited funding and no dedicated staff person make it difficult to expand this work. But a core group of committed staff continue to view their work through a climate and health lens, and now plan to incorporate climate and health education into school health classes. SLO-PHD found that staff training and messages that focus on health benefits of climate action make it both feasible and fruitful to integrate climate change into existing public health work.

Learn More

[CDPH’s SLO case story and NACCHO Stories from the Field](#)

[San Luis Obispo OutsideIn SLO](#)

[San Luis Obispo “Communicating Climate Change as a Public Health Issue” webinar](#)

[San Luis Obispo CalBRACE Climate and Health Profile](#)

Key Action Steps:



- Develop climate change, health, and equity training curriculum for LHD staff.
- Develop climate and health educational materials, including fact sheets, for the general public.
- Integrate climate change impacts and actions into established public health curricula and programs.
- Incorporate climate and health considerations in intersectoral collaboration.