

A Blueprint for Equity and Justice: Seattle-King County Public Health

Public Health - Seattle-King County (PHSKC) has put the elimination of health inequities at the core of its mission. In 2015, after participating in the development of the King County Strategic Climate Action Plan, PHSKC staff formed a Climate Health Action Team (CHAT) to develop internal expertise on climate change and health, elevate the public health voice for climate action, and develop a strategic approach to PHSKC engagement on this critical issue. The team includes representatives from across the department, including Preparedness, Communications, Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention, and Environmental Health Services.

Building Capacity for Climate and Health

CHAT started with an assessment of internal and external perspectives on the role of public health in climate change. CHAT members conducted key informant interviews with 19 individuals on the Public Health Executive Team, as well as with leaders and staff of community-based organizations in disadvantaged communities. Several key themes emerged from these interviews plus two focus groups at community based gatherings and two surveys—one for PHSKC staff and the other for community stakeholders:

- **Knowledge:** While both PHSKC staff and community residents are aware of climate change and believe it is a health risk, they lack knowledge about specific impacts to health.
- **Priority:** Climate change is not seen as an urgent issue relative to other concerns.
- **Role:** PHSKC should take action and play a leadership role on climate change impacts on health. Action should be grounded in equity and in evidence, integrated into existing functions, and connected to community and to policy development.
- **Equity:** Work on climate and health must address equity and social justice, social determinants of health, at-risk populations, health in all policies, and increased preparedness and resiliency.
- **Collaboration:** Community representation and engagement are essential, including mechanisms to better participation in county decision making processes.



Source: Public Health Seattle-King County

Based on these themes, and with input from CBO partners Puget Sound Sage and Got Green, and from the County Climate Leadership Team, the CHAT team developed a PHSKC Blueprint for Addressing Climate Change and Health. The Blueprint discusses existing opportunities and gaps, outlines strategies to increase internal capacity, and identifies ways in which climate change can be integrated into existing public health programs and functions.



Additionally, CHAT recommended a series of climate and health trainings for PHSKC staff. The Climate Leadership Team requested that those trainings be made available to all county staff. Engagement of senior PHSKC leadership from the outset of the CHAT work has also helped to establish climate change as a priority within the executive team.

Complementary to CHAT's internal capacity building and community engagement efforts, they partnered with University of Washington to develop a comic zine series focused on extreme heat and heat coping strategies. The zine was designed to specifically reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity in the Chinatown-International District and Rainier Valley areas.

Future Work and Lessons Learned

Public health staff are now working with other agencies to determine the most relevant climate and health content for various county staff, and scheduling climate and health trainings across various agencies, to include issues such as storm water, food systems, air quality, extreme heat, and open space.

Learn More

- [Beating the Heat, for Your Health](#)

Key Action Steps:



- Establish a Climate and Health Action Team that includes representatives from as many LHD programs/divisions as possible. Include subject matter experts, CBOs, academic institutions, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Conduct interviews and/or survey LHD leadership and staff to assess current knowledge and perceptions about climate and health and LHD action on climate, health, and equity. Conduct interviews, surveys, and focus groups with CBOs, and stakeholders.
- Develop an internal and/or external guidance document for LHD climate action on health. Provide climate and health training for LHD staff and other local agency staff.
- Develop a series of public educational materials that are culturally linguistically appropriate and accessible.