



US Department of Health and Human Services

Climate Change and Health

Communications and Outreach Strategy

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health

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CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH
COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH STRATEGY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)
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The mission of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is to enhance and protect the health and well-being of all Americans. We fulfill that mission by providing for effective health and human services and fostering advances in medicine, public health, and social services. HHS considers climate change to be one of the top public health challenges facing our Nation.

Recent reports from the [U.S. Global Change Research Program](#) (USGCRP) and the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) indicate that climate change is already negatively affecting human health in the United States, its territories and insular areas, and likely will have greater harmful effects in the future. In addition to directly affecting health, events associated with climate change such as increases in the frequency and severity of heat waves, storms, floods, and other extreme weather events affect our ability to provide health care and human services to communities and individuals.

HHS must protect our Nation's health and provide essential health and human services, especially for those who are most vulnerable to health impacts and least able to help themselves. Climate change brings diverse health challenges that HHS can address. In the 2014 HHS Climate Adaptation Plan¹, HHS committed to preparing for the challenges posed by climate change, understanding that health and well-being depend on healthy and sustainable environments.

HHS committed to taking a leading role by developing this Climate Change and Health Communications and Outreach Strategy (Strategy). This strategy aims to communicate the relationship between our Nation's health and the health of our environment, and the impact of climate change on both. The HHS strategy acknowledges the importance of leveraging the broader health and medical community to disseminate the latest information related to climate change and health. This strategy is designed to translate complex research and concepts into understandable and actionable information, to put it in the hands of our stakeholders and the public.

¹ <http://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/about/sustainability/2014-climate-change.pdf>

I. WHO IS OUR AUDIENCE?²

- **Public Health Leadership:** HHS Staff Divisions/Operating Divisions; federal partners; state, territorial, and local health departments (including emergency management); schools of public health; tribal health departments
- **Health Care Providers:** Medical and nursing professionals, including school nurses, hospitals, community health clinics, assisted living centers, skilled nursing facilities, behavioral health providers, medical and nursing schools, emergency medical volunteers.
- **General Public, Particularly Vulnerable Populations:** Children, adolescents, pregnant women; seniors; people with disabilities; people with chronic conditions, such as asthma or heart disease; behavioral health patients; people in certain occupations, such as those who work outside; and people who live in communities with environmental justice concerns.

II. WHAT ARE OUR GOALS?

- Increase public awareness and knowledge of the effects of climate change on health
- Protect and promote health and well-being in a changing climate
- Fulfill commitments expressed in the HHS Climate Adaptation Plan, and respond to recommendations from stakeholders

III. WHAT DO WE AIM TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CLIMATE AND HEALTH?

- Key messages on the current and future health impacts of climate change, particularly for vulnerable populations
- Information about HHS resources and programming on climate change and health
- Ongoing work occurring in the areas of research, preparedness, adaptation, and response
- Resources available to individuals and communities
- New opportunities for collaboration and increased engagement with our constituencies

² Adapted from Forrester Research: <https://www.forrester.com/report/The+POST+Process+Drives+Social+Success/-/E-RES43656>

KEY MESSAGES³

Our communications will be based on the best scientific information from trusted sources, such as the United States Global Change Research Program. We will share key findings about the health risks posed by climate change, and make available tools and strategies for addressing the challenges of climate change.

Climate change threatens human health and well-being in many ways, including impacts from increased extreme weather events, wildfire, decreased air quality, threats to behavioral health, and illnesses transmitted by food, water, and vectors such as mosquitoes and ticks. Climate change can also negatively impact local economies and food sources, which, in turn, can affect population health. Some of these health impacts are already underway in the United States, its territories and insular areas.

- Climate change is expected to increase the risk of diseases related to the heart and lungs, worsen conditions such as allergies and asthma, and alter the pathways of food and waterborne diseases.

Climate change will, absent other changes, amplify some of the existing health threats the Nation now faces. Certain people and communities are especially at risk.

- The most vulnerable among us — children, seniors, people living in poverty, people with underlying health conditions including behavioral health disorders, workers in certain occupations and people living in certain geographic areas, especially those in communities with environmental justice concerns — are at greater risk from such effects and less likely able to adapt to our changing climate.

Public health actions, especially preparedness and prevention, can do much to protect people from some of the impacts of climate change. Early action provides the largest health benefits. As threats increase, our ability to adapt to future changes may be limited.

- Hazards linked to climate change include more severe and frequent weather events that potentially disrupt continuity of care and access to essential health and human services.

³ Third National Climate Assessment (<http://www.globalchange.gov/what-we-do/assessment>)

- Leaders and residents of coastal regions are increasingly aware of the high vulnerability of coasts to climate change, and are developing plans to prepare for potential impacts on citizens.
- Health care facilities are anchors for our communities, and their resilience to withstand severe weather is critical to maintain continuity of care for patients.

Responses to climate change in non-health sectors like energy, agriculture and transportation have the potential to improve human health and well-being.

- Making it easier for people to walk or bike can reduce reliance on cars that produce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as promote physical activity and help people achieve health and fitness goals.
- Reducing carbon pollution also reduces long-term adverse climate and health impacts, thus producing cost savings in the near and longer term.
- There is growing recognition that the magnitude of these health “co-benefits” could be significant, both from a public health and an economic standpoint.

IV. HOW WILL WE MEET OUR GOALS?

- Develop, disseminate, and promote climate change and health information
- Foster new, innovative collaborations by helping federal agencies, national and community-based organizations, and other key stakeholders to coordinate their communications efforts on the health implications of climate change
- Improve the capacity of HHS agencies and organizations to deliver information on climate health through providing technical assistance and training on the use of communications tools
- Enhance and promote other federal agency communication and outreach efforts

V. HOW WILL WE DISSEMINATE OUR MESSAGES?

- Coordinate and leverage climate change outreach activities across HHS
- Host in-person and virtual events (such as webinars and town halls)
- Participate in federal, state, and local climate change initiatives, as appropriate, to ensure climate change is included as a core component of public health

- Increase and intensify our use of social media and online resources to engage the general public via new media platforms “anytime, anywhere, and on any device” (Digital Government Strategy) and encourage individuals to personalize and share information
- Connect with key audiences, such as vulnerable populations, through trusted leaders/organizers (e.g. professional societies, community leaders, etc.)
- Package and distribute user-friendly tools and products for stakeholders to use and more broadly disseminate

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Tools and platforms we expect to use throughout the implementation of our communications strategy and the potential outcomes of our efforts.

Tools and Platforms	Potential Outcomes					
	Interact with Stakeholders	Highlight News and Events	Raise Awareness	Provide Training and Technical Assistance	Receive Feedback	Promote Our Partners
Toolkits	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
Reports/Factsheets	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Newsletter / Email Digest	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
TV / Print Media	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Webinar / Digital Town Hall	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Blog	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Twitter	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Facebook	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Website	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y

IMPLEMENTATION

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR HEALTH: WEBSITE

- Launch [HHS.gov/climate](https://www.hhs.gov/climate) to provide a hub for information related to climate change and health, compiling access to resources of all HHS agencies in one area.

USGCRP: REPORT, FACT SHEETS, SOCIAL MEDIA

- *NEW REPORT* – Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment. A new report estimates the current and future impacts of climate change on public health. This comprehensive scientific assessment finds that climate change is a significant threat to the health of the American people, worsening existing health threats and creating new ones. The USGCRP developed this report as part of the National Climate Assessment and the President’s Climate Action Plan. HHS staff helped to lead the development and writing of this report, and will also release fact sheets and other communications tools as part of this initiative. health2016.globalchange.gov

PRESIDENT’S TASK FORCE ON CHILDREN’S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH (Task Force):

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE

- The Task Force, co-chaired by the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, gathered examples of policy actions at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels to highlight what different communities are doing, in the form of policy actions and programs, to protect children’s health against the impacts of climate change. As part of this “Policy Roundup,” various programs will be highlighted on a new Task Force’s webpage set to launch later this year. In the meantime, the programs can be found at: <https://www.epa.gov/children/presidents-task-force-environmental-health-and-safety-risks-children>

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION: FACT SHEETS

- The agency created five fact sheets with the America Public Health Association that describe how climate change can affect our health in different ways, and will soon be holding a webinar to introduce these fact sheets. Excerpts from these fact sheets can be used on various new media platforms. <http://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/>

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH: TOOLKIT

- Sustainable and Climate Resilient Health Care Facilities Initiative (SCRHFI), a toolkit for health care facilities was posted to the White House Climate Resilience Toolkit in 2015, and is being piloted through a partnership with Health Care without Harm and the Health Care Climate Council. Their feedback will be used to refine and revise the toolkit. <http://toolkit.climate.gov/>

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE (NLM): WEBINAR, WEBSITE, ONLINE RESOURCES

- The National Library of Medicine uses several outreach strategies to inform public health professionals about the health effects of climate change. These include websites, promotional efforts through training, exhibiting, project funding, and classroom activities that inform and provide evidence-based resources. NLM provides resources for the general public and the classroom including the Environmental Health Student Portal, Tox Town, and Enviro-Health Links. MedinePlus provides the public with resources in all major health issues, including a section on Climate Change in both English and Spanish and selectively in over 40 other languages. Resources for specific populations include Arctic Health and American Indian Health. Professional resources include PubMed/MEDLINE, TOXNET, and Disaster Lit: Resource Guide for Disaster Medicine and Public Health.
- Outreach efforts include the NLM Distance Learning Program that has recurring programs for minority students in Puerto Rico, Alaska, Hawaii and Los Angeles on climate change and environmental issues. The Environmental Health Information Partnership (EnHIP) is a long-standing outreach program to enhance the capacity of minority serving academic institutions to reduce health disparities through the access, use and delivery of environmental health information on their campuses and in their communities. Recurring programming includes climate change, environmental health and health disparities. New media efforts to inform the public include environmental health and disaster Twitter feeds and listservs. Annually, NLM also co-teaches a graduate level course on environmental health sciences that includes two lectures on climate change.

Classroom resources on climate change:

- **Environmental Health Student Portal** (<http://kidsenvirohealth.nlm.nih.gov/>) – A multi-media resource for middle school students and teachers that provide resources, games, and activities on climate change, greenhouse gases, impact of weather, health effects and student/community action.
- **Tox Town** (<https://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/>) – Interactive guide to toxic substances and environmental health issues in everyday places for the general public and high school students and teachers. Climate change is a “location” in several of the six scenes.
- **NLM Distance Learning** – A partnership of four high schools including King Drew Medical Magnet High School in Los Angeles, California, Kotzebue High School in Kotzebue, Alaska, Farrington High School in Honolulu, Hawaii and University of Puerto Rico’s Laboratory High School. The program features topics of interest to students considering careers in health sciences. Climate change and environmental health is a recurring topic.

Specific populations outreach:

- **Arctic Health** (<http://arctichealth.nlm.nih.gov/>) – A source of information on diverse aspects of the Arctic environment and the health of northern peoples. Climate Change is a highlighted feature and includes links to websites, publications, and multimedia presentations covering the impacts of climate change on the health, activities, and well-being of people in the Arctic. The page provides links to climate change observations from both the scientific research and the traditional-knowledge points of view.
- **American Indian Health** (<https://americanindianhealth.nlm.nih.gov/index.html>) – An information portal to address issues affecting the health and well-being of American Indians. One health topic covered is environmental health that includes effects of climate change on health.
- **Environmental Health Information Partnership (EnHIP)** – A long standing outreach program to enhance the capacity of minority serving academic institutions to reduce health disparities through the access, use and delivery of environmental health information on their campuses

and in their communities. During the annual meetings, climate change and health disparities have been a recurring topic as has environmental justice.

For the general public:

- **MedlinePlus and MedlinePlus en español** (medlineplus.gov and medlineplus.gov/esp) – A collection of basic health information including drug information, multimedia resources from NIH, CDC, other HHS and government and non-profit agencies. Links the public to genetic information, clinical trials.gov, and research articles in PubMed.

Professional Resources include:

- **MEDLINE/PubMed** (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/) – Over 25 million citations to biomedical research articles including climate change and health effects.
- **TOXNET** (<http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/>) – A collection of databases on hazardous chemicals, toxic releases and environmental health, TOXNET provides access to the Hazardous Substances Data Bank, DART (Developmental and Reproductive Toxicology Database), and TOXLINE, all of which contain journal articles and information about climate change and health.
- **Enviro-Health Links Climate Change and Human Health** (<https://sis.nlm.nih.gov/enviro/climatechange.html>) – has selected links of government and non-government information about climate change and its impact on health, agriculture, infectious diseases, water quality and more. The links also include law, policy, and regulation, educational materials, and other sources of information.
- **Disaster Lit: Resource Guide for Disaster Medicine and Public Health** (<http://disasterlit.nlm.nih.gov/>) – Contains over 235 records for resources on climate change including books, conference materials, guidelines/assessment tools, training materials, reports, and web pages from organizations such as APA, APHA, ASTHO, CDC, CSTE, European Union, WHO, White House, NAP, NOAA, HHS, EPA, UN, and World Bank.
- NLM co-leads the “**Foundation for Advanced Education in the Sciences (FAES) at the NIH**” a graduate level annual course in *Environmental Health Sciences*. Climate change is a key topic in the course lectures, and the focus of two lectures: “Introduction to the causes and effects of

climate change, including effects on human health” and “Climate change and health: challenges and opportunities.”

- **New Media:** NLM-TOX-ENVIRO-HEALTH-L@list.nih.gov and DISASTR-Outreach-Lib@list.nih.gov (email updates) and [@NLM_SIS](https://twitter.com/NLM_SIS) and [@NLM_DIMRC](https://twitter.com/NLM_DIMRC) on Twitter.