Preparing Health Systems for Climate Change: HHS Office of Climate Change and Health Equity

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NICHM Webinar
January 26, 2022
Overview

• Impacts of Climate Change on Health and Health Systems
• Linking Climate Change and Health Equity
• OCCHE and our role in helping health systems prepare for climate change
The Public Health Impacts of Climate Change

- Injuries, fatalities, mental health impacts
- Asthma, cardiovascular disease
- Severe Weather
- Air Pollution
- Malaria, dengue, encephalitis, hantavirus, Rift Valley fever, Lyme disease, chikungunya, West Nile virus
- Respiratory allergies, asthma
- Forced migration, civil conflict, mental health impacts
- Extreme Heat
- Changes in Vector Ecology
- Increasing Allergens
- Malnutrition, diarrheal disease
- Water and Food Supply Impacts
- Water Quality Impacts
- Cholera, cryptosporidiosis, campylobacter, leptospirosis, harmful algal blooms
Intersection of Social Determinants of Health and Vulnerability

Climate and Health Assessment, 2016
What does this mean for health care systems?

- Elderly populations
  - Heat-related morbidity, air pollution effects, West Nile Virus and other ID’s, Extreme events
- Low-income populations
  - Heat-related morbidity, respiratory diseases from air pollution, molds and pollens, vector-borne diseases (esp. outdoor workers), flooding and extreme events
- People with chronic medical conditions (durable medical equipment)
  - Heat or other weather extremes and loss of electricity in homes
- People with disabilities
  - Heat or other extreme events and ability to shelter, avoid exposures
- All populations
  - Need to improve Social Determinants of Health through infrastructure and other climate change related investments
EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON HEALTH SYSTEMS

- Costs
- Utilization
- Disruptions of Care
- Public Health

WHAT HEALTH SYSTEMS CAN DO

- Climate Resiliency
- Evidence-Based Adaptation
- Disaster Preparedness
- CO₂
- Carbon Footprint
- Training and Education
How do climate change and health equity intersect?

*The story of Hurricane Katrina*
1923, City of Richmond, Virginia – “Residential Security Map”

Source: Nelson, Winling, Marciano, Connolly, et al., Mapping Inequality
Formerly redlined areas have less tree cover today than areas that weren’t redlined.

They have more paved surfaces, like roads and parking lots, that absorb and radiate heat.
That adds to up to higher summer temperatures compared to the city average.
Origins of the Office of Climate Change and Health Equity

E.O. 14008 - “Tackling the Climate Crisis”

- HHS mandates (Section 222(d))
  - Office of Climate Change and Health Equity
  - Interagency Working Group to Decrease Risk of Climate Change to Children, the Elderly, People with Disabilities, and the Vulnerable
  - Biennial Health Care System Readiness Advisory Council
History will judge us for the actions we take today to protect our world and our health from climate change.

Xavier Becerra  
HHS Secretary for Health

COVID-19 highlighted the inequities faced throughout our nation… same groups struggling the most with the effects of climate change on our health.

Admiral Rachel Levine  
HHS Assistant Secretary for Health

OCCHE…to bring America’s world-class medical community into the fight against climate change—a fight for our health that ensures no community is left behind.

Gina McCarthy  
National Climate Advisor
**Office of Climate Change & Health Equity (OCCHE)**

**Priority 1: Climate & Health Resilience for Most Vulnerable**

- Capturing community and health system vulnerabilities and logging adaptation gaps
- Enhancing the resilience of health systems and communities to climate change effects
- Building on existing networks and plans to develop a national plan for health adaptation

**Priority 2: Climate Actions to Reduce Health Disparities**

**Priority 3: Health Sector Resilience & Decarbonization**

**Resilient Health Systems**

- Coordinating Federal health system greenhouse gas accounting and reduction targets
- Partnership with private health sector to develop an action plan for reductions via incentives, technical assistance, policy guidance, applied research, toolkits, training, use of regulatory authorities as needed, etc.

**Low-Carbon Health Systems**
FACT SHEET: President Biden Signs Executive Order Catalyzing America’s Clean Energy Economy Through Federal Sustainability

U.S. Government Will Lead by Example to Leverage Scale and Procurement Power to Drive Clean, Healthy, and Resilient Operations

Today, President Biden will sign an executive order that demonstrates how the United States will leverage its scale and procurement power to lead by example in tackling the climate crisis. The executive order will reduce emissions across federal operations, invest in American clean energy industries and manufacturing, and create clean, healthy, and resilient communities. The President is building on his whole-of-government effort to tackle the climate crisis in a way that creates well-paying jobs, grows industries, and makes the country more economically competitive.

The President’s executive order directs the federal government to use its scale and procurement power to achieve five ambitious goals:

- 100 percent carbon pollution-free electricity (CFE) by 2030, at least half of which will be locally supplied clean energy to meet 24/7 demand;
- 100 percent zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) acquisitions by 2035, including 100 percent zero-emission light-duty vehicle acquisitions by 2027;
- Net-zero emissions from federal procurement no later than 2050, including a Buy Clean policy to promote use of construction materials with lower embodied emissions;
- A net-zero emissions building portfolio by 2045, including a 50 percent emissions reduction by 2032; and
- Net-zero emissions from overall federal operations by 2050, including a 65 percent emissions reduction by 2030.
Priority 1: Climate and Health Resilience for Most Vulnerable

• Current
  ▪ Extreme Heat Working Group focused on better connecting resources (health, financial) to those most in need
  ▪ Partnership with Low-Income Energy Assistance Program and Medicare/Medicaid to explore climate adaptation

• Anticipated
  ▪ Convene new Interagency Working Group
  ▪ Build local capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate change related health threats
Priority 2: Climate Actions to Reduce Health Disparities

- **Current**
  - Exploring innovative models for health systems to improve social determinants of health

- **Anticipated**
  - Build and promote technical capacity to assess health implications of major infrastructure projects

https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/determinants/index.html
Proposed Rule: Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; HHS Notice of Benefit and Payment Parameters for 2023 FRN p. 693:

“HHS further seeks to explore how Exchanges and their constituent organizations can more fully prepare for the harmful impacts of climate change on their enrollees. …

Generally, HHS seeks input on how Qualified Health Plans can more effectively:
(1) Determine likely climate impacts on their enrollees and particularly the most vulnerable enrollees;
(2) determine potential costs of these impacts;
(3) develop plans to mitigate catastrophic and chronic impacts for these populations (that is, plans for resilience); and
(4) Take responsibility for greenhouse gas emission reduction across the networks of organizations that make up their exchanges.”
Policy Areas for Exploration

**Resilience**
- Update guidance on preparedness with attention to vulnerable populations
- Increase flexibilities in innovation programs (CMCS, CMMI) to get supports to vulnerable beneficiaries
- Introduce climate-sensitive indicators into measurement updates (HHS, CMS)
- Invest in increased technical assistance on preparedness (HPP, etc.)

**Decarbonization**
- Select high-impact, evidence-based actions (priority interventions on Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions)
- Accelerate GHG accounting and GHG tracking tool development
- Increase technical assistance (vehicles in place, funding needed to support health systems and other facility types)
- Explore incentives to engage hospitals on decarbonization (e.g., tax incentives, CMS payment)
Thank you!

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