Sharing the Successes and Failures of Starting a Justice Focused Climate & Health Program

National Public Health Law Summit
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Speakers

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Department of Health

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(she/her)  
Climate Justice Coordinator  
Washington State  
Department of Health
Presentation Overview

- WA’s Climate & Health Program
- Examples of WA State Climate Justice & Health Equity Work
- Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act
- Climate & Health Adaptation Initiative (CHAI)
Starting a Climate & Health Section

Our Origin Story & Other Climate and Health Section Structures
* First failure; unsuccessful BRACE grant application
Observed U.S. Temperature Change

Source: Nasa Earth Observatory https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/83624/climate-changes-in-the-united-states (9/20/2022)
How are CDC Funded Climate Programs Staffed?

BRACE Cities and States Climate and Health Staffing Models, N=11

- Any Evaluator: Avg FTE, 0.27
- Staff Evaluator: Avg FTE, .09
- Contracted Evaluator: Avg FTE, .27
- Epidemiologist: Avg FTE, 0.5
- Senior Program Manager: Avg FTE, 0.5
- Program Manager: Avg FTE, 0.5

Program Average FTE = 3.4
How to Create a Climate and Health Program for Free

Existing Division Structure
How to Create a Climate and Health Program for Free

New Division Structure

Climate and Health Section
Where We Are Now
Shifting Priorities: Current Public Health Practice

Sources: WA Dept of Ecology, Mother Jones, WNW Toxic Algae
Shifting Priorities: Projections

Source: Washington Tracking Network, Annual Days Over 99th Percentile Historical Temperature Threshold
Shifting Priorities: Adaptation and Resilience

DIY FILTER FAN

**MATERIALS:**

- 20" X 20" Box Fan
- Heavy Duty Tape
- 20" X 20" Air Filter (MERV13 or FPR 10)

When in doubt, **STAY OUT**!

Toxic algae blooms happen in this lake

Avoid areas of scum

For more information or to report a bloom:
http://phhealth.org  |  206-684-7680

Source: Public Health Seattle & King County, Urban Design for Mental Health
Funding | Leadership

- National Environmental Health Association – Climate Health Adaptation and Mitigation Partnership (CHAMP)
- Foundational Public Health Services
- State general fund
- CDC Environmental Health Capacity Grant
- Funding through local partners

*Many existing climate-sensitive hazards and exposures are underfunded

Source: Matrix Management Institute
Foundational Public Health Services
A New Vision for Washington State

Source: Stack Exchange
Challenges: Public Health Role

Source: Stack Exchange
Challenges: Health Washing

Figure 1:
Improving environmental health by reducing carbon emissions through increasing climate resilience and mitigating the effects of climate change by levying a carbon pollution tax, authorizing a climate finance bond program, and investing in clean economic growth

HB 1513

Source: Medium: https://medium.com/@stefanoucc/greenwashing-and-fake-sustainability-804f3647dd62
"Public health is at a crisis point. With a changing climate, ensuring basic public health services for every person in every location within our lifetime is the true measure of public health success".

– Lauren Jenks, Assistant Secretary EPH, WA DOH
WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
TRANSFORMATIONAL PLAN
A VISION FOR HEALTH IN WASHINGTON STATE

GLOBAL AND ONE HEALTH

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

HEALTH SYSTEMS AND WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

CORNERSTONE VALUES: EQUITY • INNOVATION • ENGAGEMENT
VISION: EQUITY AND OPTIMAL HEALTH FOR ALL
VISION

All Washingtonians will thrive in a broad range of healthy environments — natural, built, and social.

COMMITMENT

We will lead broad efforts that address external factors impacting health, safety, and well-being, recognize the intersection of people, animals, and environment, and incorporate principles of environmental justice and shared responsibility for community health.

KEY STRATEGIES

1. **Support** systems and policies that promote optimal individual and community health by investing in proactive efforts to advance a broad range of healthy environments and interactions where people live, learn, work, worship, and play.

2. **Ensure** our policies, planning, and programming incorporate environmental justice principles with the goal of reducing health inequities and promoting community well-being.

3. **Incorporate** data-driven approaches and community engagement strategies, assets and strengths, into public health and response planning efforts aimed at building resilience against the health and social impacts of climate change and other environmental challenges.

4. **Ensure** communities likely to bear the worst climate-related environmental health impacts have resources and support to foster resilient communities that promote true health and well-being.

5. **Support** initiatives that promote safe and active living, commuting and recreation, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and increase community cohesion.

6. **Communicate** and promote the health benefits of behavior change and interventions that protect our environment, while ensuring equitable access to health opportunities through robust data systems and information sharing.
Discussion Time!

1. What comes to mind when you try to define / explain climate justice?

2. Are you able to explicitly talk about & work to address climate change in your work?
   • If not, what have you found to be successful in working around this challenge?
   • If so, how?

3. Are you able to explicitly talk about & work to advance anti-racism & equity in your public health / climate change / environmental / sustainability work?
   • If not, how are you working around this?
   • If so, how are you prioritizing environmental and climate justice?
Climate Justice & Health Equity

What is public health’s role in advancing climate justice?
### Examples of Health Consequences from a Changing Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climate Driver</th>
<th>Exposure</th>
<th>Health Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Heat</td>
<td>More frequent, severe, prolonged heat events</td>
<td>Elevated temperatures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Air Quality</td>
<td>Increasing temperatures and changing precipitation patterns</td>
<td>Worsened air quality (ozone, particulate matter, and higher pollen counts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Rising sea level and more frequent or intense extreme precipitation, hurricanes, and storm surge events</td>
<td>Contaminated water, debris, and disruptions to essential infrastructure</td>
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Source: Fourth National Climate Assessment
Examples of Health Consequences from a Changing Climate

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Drivers, Exposures, and Outcomes are unevenly felt & worsening health inequities

Source: Fourth National Climate Assessment
The Urgent Need to Lead with Climate Justice

Climate change adds to existing health inequities in communities and populations least responsible for the climate crisis.

Drivers of Climate Inequities in the US
- Racism & Discrimination
- Environmental injustices
- Poverty
- High-risk occupations
- Pre-existing health needs
- Limited English proficiency
“Transition is inevitable. Justice is not.”

Justice & Ecology Project

Meaningful community engagement
WA’s Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act Goals

- Implement many of WA’s EJ Task Force recommendations
- Incorporate EJ into state agency decision-making processes
- Improve state government accountability to communities
- Create consistent & accessible pathways for community to be meaningfully involved in government decision making processes
Adopt community engagement plans

Incorporate EJ into agency strategic plans

Incorporate EJ into budget & funding decisions

Conduct EJ assessments
And beyond
Climate Justice in Action at WA DOH
Implementing HEAL Act & Climate Justice Priorities Concurrently
Building out a Climate Justice Position

- Leadership buy-in
- LISTENING: Building relationships & trust
- Implementing community climate justice priorities
Internal Priorities for Climate Justice

- Equity reviews for language & content gaps
- Internal education on CJ
- Collaborating & coordinating across state gov
- Regular anti-racism, decolonization discussions

Process
Climate & Health Adaptation Initiative (CHAI)

Bringing Partners Together to Resource Community Climate & Health Priorities
Climate & Health Adaptation Initiative (CHAI)

Mission
• Assist & resource communities that have the fewest opportunities for living healthy lives in a changing climate.

Process
• Bottom-up
• Relationships first
• Community-driven timeline

Regions of Focus Have
• Existing climate plans & some local capacity to implement plans
• High risk/occurrence of climate-related health impacts
• Communities with environmental justice concerns
• High % BIPOC and/or low-income communities
• Tribes & Tribal lands
## Initial CHAI Regions in WA

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<th>Pierce County</th>
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<td>• Building capacity for their Beat the Heat Program</td>
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<td>• Public health education for climate change practitioners</td>
<td>• Supporting public engagement &amp; education re: heat &amp; smoke</td>
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Initial CHAI Regions in WA

Environmental Justice & Climate Justice & Health Equity

Pierce County
- Extreme heat, wildfire, smoke, sea level rise
- Funding county health dept. heat & smoke plan
- Coordinating City/County/Tribal climate plans

Clallam/Jefferson Counties
- Landslides, flooding, wildfires, energy, disaster preparedness
- Identifying funding mechanisms for climate & health priorities
- Public health education for climate change practitioners

City of Spokane
- Extreme heat & wildfire smoke
- Building capacity for their Beat the Heat Program
- Supporting public engagement & education re: heat & smoke
Questions?
Working together for a healthier tomorrow...

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