

Getting Involved in Climate Change Action Planning



Public health employees have an important role to play in shaping policies and plans designed to address climate change. As experts on the health of our communities and on the needs of vulnerable communities, public health staff can ensure that these needs are addressed while we prepare to adapt to a changing climate. Policy work can include collaborating with local or regional planning agencies, writing letters or providing testimony to advocate for healthy policies, or participating on boards or commissions that address climate change issues.

Opportunities abound for raising health equity concerns in planning processes to address climate change. California’s Senate Bill 375 requires each region to develop a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) – an integrated transportation and land-use strategy to accommodate future population growth and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and light trucks. The participation of public health staff in this recent, regional process helped create a more equitable and health-focused plan for the Bay Area.ⁱ

There are also opportunities to get involved at the local level as municipalities use the SCS guidance to plan for their future housing and land use development via agencies that are accountable to local boards of supervisors, such as:

- City and county transportation commissions
- County congestion management agencies (CMAs)
- Transit agencies
- Sales tax authorities

Cities across California are also adopting voluntary plans to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These include amendments to General Plans, comprehensive sustainability plans, and Climate Action Plans, among others.ⁱⁱ

In all these planning efforts, public health can educate planners, engineers, and policy-makers about the links between active transportation, housing, and health outcomes and ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable and least resourced communities are addressed. BARHII created a set of downloadable resources that can assist public health staff to participate in planning efforts: (1) *The Healthy Planning Guide* and (2) *Partners in Public Health*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Spotlight on Alameda County

The Adapting to Rising Tides (ART) project is a collaborative planning project evaluating how Bay Area communities can improve their resilience to sea level rise and storm events. The project was initiated in 2010 by the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) with NOAA Coastal Services Center. This cross-jurisdictional project is focused on a Bay Area sub-region, which includes a portion of the Alameda County shoreline from Emeryville to Union City. Alameda County Public Health Department was invited to participate from the inception. Public Health staff attended planning meetings / strategy sessions and helped to ensure a public health equity focus was included. Public Health staff provided consultation to BCDC staff in scoping of the project to ensure hazardous materials, community land use, and vulnerable population issues were included and edited community land use and equity reports. In addition, Public Health staff facilitated linkages to County and community-based organization staff and provided data.

Climate Action Plans

The California Department of Public Health published a guide for how public health departments can work with cities in the adoption of Climate Change Plans. It provides information on the intersection of public health and community planning. The guide, "Climate Action for Health: Integrating Public Health into Climate Action Planning" may be found at: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CCDHP/ Documents/CAPS_and_Health_Published3-22-12.pdf

OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED

At various levels of decision-making:

Local

- Work with local port commissions and regional and state regulatory agencies to enforce cleaner goods-movement and emissions-reduction policies.
- Partner with community groups and residents to reach out to populations that may not traditionally participate in land use decisions. Support community outreach efforts and bring a health lens to the process.
- Participate in developing healthy land use and climate change plans and policies to ensure that they reflect local needs and prioritize communities most impacted by inequities.
- Promote school siting policies that locate schools in the center of communities to maximize community use and accessibility.

Regional

- Participate in the development of regional Air Quality Management District plans and the update of the Sustainable Communities Strategy to ensure that vulnerable communities will not be negatively impacted by GHG reduction strategies.
- Encourage increasing green energy sources and providing affordable energy for low-income consumers.
- Participate in the development of county transportation plans to ensure that active transportation and improvements to transport connectivity are priorities.

State

- Help shape spending plans for cap and trade revenues to support the development of healthy and equitable communities.
- Support efforts to establish a funding source for affordable housing production in transit-rich areas.
- Participate in strategies such as Health in All Policies (HiAP).^{iv}

Federal

- Support funding in climate change research that considers health impacts.
- Encourage increased funding for public transit and active transportation infrastructure in the federal transportation reauthorization.
- Highlight the need for flexible public health funding to support climate change efforts.

It is the mission of the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative to transform public health practice for the purpose of eliminating health inequities using a broad spectrum of approaches that create healthy communities.

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REFERENCES

- http://www.mtc.ca.gov/news/press_releases/rel614.htm
- http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CCDHP/ Documents/CAPS_and_Health_Published3-22-12.pdf
- http://barhii.org/resources/downloads/barhii_healthy_planning_guide.pdf and http://barhii.org/resources/downloads/partners_for_public_health.pdf
- <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Pages/HealthinAllPolicies.aspx>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- American Public Health Association, Advocacy Tips, <http://www.apha.org/advocacy/tips/default.htm>
- Change Lab Solutions – Healthy Planning Tools: <http://changelabsolutions.org/healthy-planning/search-tools>
- Photo on front page: <http://pedbikeimages.org/> - Dan Burden
- Photo on back page: <http://urbanhabitat.org>