

Integrating Environmental Justice and Health Equity into Statewide Climate Planning

Background

Embedding environmental justice and health equity into climate change strategies is crucial for ensuring that climate policies are both effective and equitable. As climate change exacerbates environmental challenges such as air and water pollution, extreme weather events, and rising temperatures, its impacts often disproportionately affect marginalized communities. These groups, which include economically disadvantaged communities and historically underrepresented racial and ethnic populations, frequently face higher exposure to environmental hazards and have fewer resources to adapt or recover from climate-related disruptions. Incorporating environmental justice and health equity enhances the effectiveness of climate strategies by targeting interventions where they are most needed, empowering affected communities, and promoting a more inclusive and resilient response to climate challenges.

State Examples: Forging Community Resilience Through Climate Justice

In response to the growing imperative to integrate environmental justice and health equity considerations into statewide climate planning efforts, several states, including Rhode Island and California, have pioneered initiatives aimed at addressing these intersecting challenges. The examples below explore the current landscape in both states and highlight key strategies, legislative frameworks, and training efforts.

Rhode Island

At the core of Rhode Island's initiatives is a collaborative approach that involves multiple stakeholders and community engagement strategies. Key initiatives include:

- **Conducting Environmental Risk Assessments:** The state's [Environmental Health Risk Assessment Program](#) uses funds from the Climate Change Council to conduct comprehensive assessments of hazardous sites susceptible to flooding post extreme weather events. The team is currently developing story maps to complement the assessments, aimed at enhancing transparency and community involvement.
- **Developing Community Measures:** Rhode Island implements an [environmental public health tracking program](#) and provides mini-grants to [health equity zones](#) to support community plans for extreme weather events. Additionally, the state secured EPA grants to reopen a beach in an environmental justice zone and conducts initiatives like the [Heat Watch Campaign](#) to address urban heat islands and improve access to cooling centers.
- **Form Collaborative Partnerships:** Partnerships such as the [Healthy Air Collaborative](#) with the American Lung Association focus on air quality monitoring and public health campaigns. The [Department of Environmental Management \(DEM\)](#) also collaborates on community projects and recently created an environmental justice policy. In addition, DEM received a [climate pollution reduction grant](#) for climate planning, including health impact analyses and community-based

outreach. The Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources supports initiatives such as the Affordable Solar Access Program, heat pump and EV rebate programs, and community solar.

- **Support Policy and Legislation:** Legislative efforts, exemplified by [HB 7611/SB 3043 \(RI 2022\)](#), underscore Rhode Island’s commitment to integrating environmental justice considerations into climate policies. Despite challenges such as limited financial incentives for public committee participation, Rhode Island actively fosters community representation and participation.
- **Lead Training Initiatives:** DEM leads comprehensive training programs for staff, including sessions on EPA tools like [EJScreen](#). The department is expanding training across different divisions to enhance the capacity for integrating environmental justice and health equity considerations into climate strategies.

California

California aligns climate policy with health equity, community support, and capacity-building across the state. California’s legislative framework, including Assembly Bill 32 and its requirement for developing a statewide [climate change scoping plan](#), updated every five years by the California Air Resources Board, sets ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing community resilience. The plan incorporates health and equity considerations to address disparities exacerbated by climate change. Likewise, the [California Climate Adaptation Strategy](#), which links together the state’s existing and planned climate adaptation efforts to achieve California’s climate resilience priorities, centers public health and equity.

Climate, Health, and Equity Approach

The establishment of the California Department of Public Health’s (CDPH) [Climate Change and Health Equity \(CCH\) Branch](#) within the Office of Health Equity exemplifies California’s comprehensive approach. This initiative integrates health equity considerations across climate policies and initiatives, ensuring the prioritization of populations facing inequities and directing investments to these populations. The CCH Branch envisions a state where all people in California thrive in healthy, equitable, and resilient communities. To achieve this, the CCH Branch focuses on building health equity, advancing climate action, and improving living conditions through policies, systems, and environmental changes. Key strategies include:

- **Embedding Health and Racial Equity:** CDPH’s CCH Branch works to embed health and racial equity into California climate plans, programs, and policies. Equity, anti-racism, and climate justice are integrated into vision, mission and goals, hiring documents such as job descriptions and interview questions, performance evaluations, the CCH Advisory Group, and the public health accreditation process. The Branch integrates health and racial equity data, tools, and metrics into other state agencies’ climate policies and statewide plans, such as the [Extreme Heat Action Plan](#), [State Hazard Mitigation Plan](#), and [Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure](#).
- **Guiding State Investments:** The CCH Branch embeds health and racial equity data, tools, and metrics into other state agencies’ climate grants such as [Transformative Climate Communities](#), [Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities](#), and [Climate Research Program](#) so that the billions of dollars California invests in carbon emissions reduction and preparation for climate impacts also advance health and equity strategies such as: safe, stable, living-wage jobs in a clean/green economy; compact and infill land development; affordable and energy-efficient housing; clean mobility options

like public transit, walking, and cycling; urban forestry, community greening, and green infrastructure; access to healthy foods and healthcare; and resident decision-making power.

- **Providing Data and Tools:** The CCHE Branch provides data and tools to reduce the health effects of climate change and maximize the health equity benefits of climate action. Examples include the [CDPH Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Indicators Visualization tool](#), which helps users assess health vulnerability and adaptive capacity for climate change exposures in California census tracts. The CCHE Branch is also supporting the establishment of a statewide climate and health syndromic surveillance program.
- **Supporting Local Health Jurisdictions, Tribes, and Communities:** The CCHE Branch's [Local Assistance Unit](#) provides tailored support to equip California local health jurisdictions and tribes to serve their own populations and forge partnerships that increase capacity to mitigate and build resilience to climate change. For instance, the CCHE-facilitated Local Health Jurisdiction Climate and Health Community of Practices connects local health jurisdictions with each other and with CDPH to share resources, strategies, best practices, opportunities, and mutual support to overcome challenges. The [California Building Resilience Against Climate Effects Project](#) includes small amounts of funding for a home weatherization pilot project for farmworkers, communications and grant-writing support for local health jurisdictions, tribal climate planning, and capacity-building to enhance climate resilience across diverse populations.
- **Facilitating Training and Capacity-Building:** While formal training programs are evolving, CCHE engages in intra- and cross-departmental collaborations and webinars to educate staff on integrating health equity into climate initiatives and climate into public health initiatives. The Cross-CDPH Climate Change and Health Equity Working Group connects CDPH staff and programs who are working on or aspire to work on the intersections of climate change, health, and equity, to build a coordinated, responsive, and equity-focused climate change and health infrastructure for the department. Additionally, in partnership with the California Air Resources Board, CCHE organizes and facilitates public meetings of the [California Climate Action Team Public Health Workgroup](#), which addresses cross-cutting issues related to climate change and health, and provides a forum for communication, coordination, and education across state agencies and with external stakeholders.

Pioneering Pathways Towards Equitable Climate Solutions

Rhode Island and California exemplify effective approaches to integrating environmental justice and health equity into statewide climate planning. Despite distinct challenges and contexts, their efforts underscore the critical importance of collaborative initiatives, legislative frameworks, and commitment to community engagement. As states navigate the complexities of climate change, their experiences underscore the transformative potential of inclusive policies and proactive partnerships in fostering resilience and equity for all communities. Ongoing collaboration and knowledge-sharing will advance equitable climate solutions and accelerate progress toward a sustainable and just future.

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Supplement: Resource List

Training and Education

1. [Climate and Health: A Training for Health Department Staff \(CDC\)](#) – This comprehensive training program equips public health professionals with the knowledge and tools to understand the intersection of climate change and public health, providing practical guidance on integrating climate considerations into existing public health activities and fostering climate-resilient communities.
2. [Climate for Health Ambassadors Training \(ASTHO\)](#) – Designed to empower individuals as advocates for climate and health, this training program offers participants the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the health impacts of climate change and develop effective communication and advocacy skills to engage diverse stakeholders and drive meaningful action.
3. [Vector-Borne Disease Surveillance with QGIS \(ASTHO\)](#) – This training was developed to address specific requests from Insular Area Health Agencies to help build capacity to address the health impacts associated with climate change.
4. [Introduction to Climate Justice: Putting Equity into Action \(ecoAmerica\)](#) – Delving into the principles of climate justice, this resource provides an introductory framework for understanding and addressing the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized communities, emphasizing the importance of equity, inclusion, and community-led solutions in climate action efforts.
5. [Tackling Climate Change Using the One Health Approach \(ASTHO\)](#) – This blog offers insights into the One Health approach and equips readers with strategies to promote collaborative, interdisciplinary solutions to climate-related health challenges.
6. [Incorporating Principles of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Climate Adaptation Planning \(APHA\)](#) – This webinar explores the critical role of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion principles in climate adaptation planning, offering practical guidance and real-world examples for integrating equity considerations into adaptation strategies and policies at the local, state, and national levels.
7. [Climate Change and Health Playbook: Adaptation Planning for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(APHA\)](#) – The Climate Change and Health Playbook provides a comprehensive framework for integrating justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion principles into climate adaptation planning and implementation, offering actionable strategies, case studies, and resources for advancing equitable climate solutions.
8. [Building Resilience Against Climate Effects \(BRACE\) Framework \(CDC\)](#) – The BRACE framework offers a systematic approach for public health officials and practitioners to assess climate-related health risks, develop tailored adaptation strategies, and build resilience in communities, fostering collaborative partnerships and data-driven decision-making to protect public health in a changing climate.

9. [Climate Models and the Use of Climate Projections: A Brief Overview for Health Departments \(CDC\)](#) – This guide provides health departments with an in-depth overview of climate models and projections, offering insights into how public health professionals can effectively utilize these tools for public health planning and decision-making. It explores key concepts, methodologies, and best practices for interpreting and integrating climate projections into health risk assessments and adaptation strategies.
10. [Assessing Health Vulnerability to Climate Change: A Guide for Health Departments \(CDC\)](#) – This guide equips health departments with practical methodologies and tools for assessing health vulnerability to climate change. It offers step-by-step guidance on conducting vulnerability assessments, identifying vulnerable populations and health risks, and prioritizing adaptation strategies to protect public health in a changing climate.
11. [Projecting Climate-Related Disease Burden: A Guide for Health Departments \(CDC\)](#) – This guide provides health departments with evidence-based methodologies and tools for projecting disease burden related to climate change. It offers insights into epidemiological modeling techniques, data sources, and indicators for assessing the impacts of climate change on disease transmission and prevalence, enabling informed decision-making and resource allocation for public health interventions.
12. [The Six Pillars of Climate Justice \(University of California Center for Climate Justice\)](#) – This resource outlines the foundational principles of climate justice, including equity, democracy, accountability, and solidarity. It offers a framework for understanding and advancing climate justice, guiding efforts to address the root causes of climate change and promote equitable solutions that benefit all people and ecosystems.
13. [Climate Adaptation 101 \(National Resources Defense Council\)](#) – This resource provides an overview of climate adaptation basics, offering essential information and strategies for individuals and organizations looking to understand and address the impacts of climate change. It covers key concepts and practical guidance for building resilience and adapting to climate-related risks and challenges.
14. [Environmental and Climate Justice \(NAACP\)](#) – This online resource provides valuable insights into environmental injustice and the disproportionate impacts of climate change on communities of color and low-income populations. It offers educational materials, advocacy resources, and policy briefs to raise awareness and mobilize action for equitable environmental solutions.
15. [What is ‘climate justice’? \(Yale Climate Connections\)](#) – This article explores the concept of climate justice, emphasizing the need for fair and equitable responses to climate change that prioritize the needs and rights of marginalized communities. It examines key principles and examples of climate justice in action, shedding light on pathways to a more just and sustainable future.
16. [Climate Change, Health, and Equity: A Guide for Local Health Department \(APHA\)](#) – This guide, created in partnership with the Public Health Institute, bridges the work of local health departments with climate impacts and climate solutions. It includes examples of how local health departments can put climate change into their public health and health equity practices.

Data and Tools

1. [Climate Risk and Resilience \(ClimRR\) Portal \(FEMA\)](#) – ClimRR is a comprehensive online platform offers sophisticated climate data down to the neighborhood level. It provides easy access to climate projections and hazard data, empowering stakeholders to integrate future climate conditions into hazard mitigation plans, infrastructure design, and resilience strategies.
2. [EJScreen: Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool \(EPA\)](#) – EJScreen combines environmental and demographic data to identify areas with potential environmental justice concerns. It enables users to visualize and analyze environmental and demographic indicators, facilitating informed decision-making and equitable environmental planning.
3. [Environmental Justice Index \(EJI\) \(CDC\)](#) – The EJI is a comprehensive index that assesses the cumulative impacts of environmental injustice on health at the census tract level. It ranks census tracts based on thirty-six environmental, social, and health factors, providing valuable insights for targeting interventions and addressing disparities in environmental health outcomes.
4. [Climate Shift Index \(Climate Central\)](#) – This index quantifies global daily shifts in temperature experienced due to climate change. An interactive map allows users to visualize climate change weather patterns and their impacts, both locally and globally.
5. [Environmental Justice StoryMaps \(ASPIRE\)](#) – These StoryMaps highlight the complex interconnections between transportation, air quality, climate, and engineering, offering compelling narratives and visualizations to raise awareness about environmental justice issues and promote interdisciplinary solutions.
6. [The California Building Resilience for Climate Effects \(CalBRACE\) Adaptation Toolkit \(CDPH\)](#) – The CalBRACE Adaptation Toolkit provides a comprehensive suite of resources and tools to support climate resilience planning and implementation in California. It includes interactive maps, case studies, and guidance documents tailored to address the unique climate challenges faced by California communities.
7. [Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange \(CAKE\) \(EcoAdapt\)](#) – CAKE is a knowledge sharing platform that houses an extensive digital library of high-quality climate change adaptation case studies, tools, and resources. It serves as a valuable repository for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers seeking practical guidance and innovative solutions for climate adaptation.
8. [Tribal Climate Change Adaptation Planning Tool Kit \(Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals\)](#) – The Tribal Climate Change Adaptation Planning Toolkit provides tribes with customizable templates and resources to facilitate the development of climate adaptation plans tailored to their unique cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic contexts. It empowers tribes to take proactive measures to build resilience and protect tribal lands and resources.
9. [Climate Change: Resilience Planning Toolkit \(Oregon Health Authority\)](#) – The Oregon Climate Change Toolkit offers a wealth of resources and information to help stakeholders understand and address the health impacts of climate change in Oregon. It includes actionable guidance, data visualizations, and case studies to support evidence-based decision-making and climate resilience planning at the state and local levels.

10. [Climate and Health Intervention Assessment: Evidence on Public Health Interventions to Prevent the Negative Health Effects of Climate Change \(CDC\)](#) – This report evaluates the effectiveness of interventions aimed at mitigating the negative health effects of climate change. It synthesizes existing evidence, case studies, and best practices to inform decision-making and prioritize interventions that enhance resilience and protect public health in the face of climate-related risks and challenges.
11. [HeatRisk \(CDC\)](#) – This updated heat risk assessment tool, created in partnership with the National Weather Service, provides guidance for healthcare professionals in understanding and managing the health risks associated with heat exposure.
12. [State Climate and Health Adaptation Plans and Resources \(ASTHO\)](#) – This story map provides access to state-level climate and health adaptation plans and resources, helping stakeholders understand and address climate-related health risks.
13. [State Adaptation Progress Tracker \(Georgetown Climate Center\)](#) – Georgetown Climate Center offers a map that highlights the status of state climate change adaptation plans, including a breakdown of each state’s adaptation work, links to plans, and resources.
14. [Climate Change and Health: A Framework for Action \(Public Health Institute\)](#) – This framework by the Center for Climate Change and Health visually depicts opportunities for public health departments and partners to work together to improve climate change outcomes, using health equity linkages.
15. [Coastal Risk Screening Tool \(Climate Central\)](#) – This screening tool uses an interactive map to display areas threatened by rising sea levels and coastal flooding.

Reports and Case Studies

1. [Overlooked and Overburdened: People Experiencing Homelessness and Heat \(National Integrated Heat Health Information System\)](#) – This study investigates the profound impact of heat on individuals experiencing homelessness, shedding light on the vulnerability of this population to extreme weather events and the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems.
2. [How Pennsylvania Health Department’s Cross-Sector Partnerships Are Strengthening Climate and Environmental Justice \(ASTHO\)](#) – This report delves into Pennsylvania's innovative cross-sector partnerships, showcasing how the state's health department collaborates with diverse stakeholders to bolster climate resilience and environmental justice initiatives, providing a roadmap for similar endeavors nationwide.
3. [Heat-Related Emergency Department Visits, United States, May – September 2023 \(CDC\)](#) – This report presents a detailed analysis of heat-related emergency department visits in the United States during the summer months of 2023, highlighting the disproportionate impact of extreme heat events on public health and underscoring the critical importance of preventive measures and public health interventions.
4. [Climate Change and Health: Assessing State Preparedness \(Trust for America's Health\)](#) – This report evaluates the preparedness of states to mitigate and respond to the health impacts of climate change, offering insights into existing strengths, gaps, and opportunities for enhancing state-level strategies and interventions to protect public health in a changing climate.

5. [Climate Change and Health: Advancing Distributional Equity in Climate Adaptation \(Trust for America's Health\)](#) – This series of case studies showcases innovative approaches and successful initiatives aimed at advancing distributional equity in climate adaptation efforts, highlighting promising practices and lessons learned from diverse communities across the United States.
6. [Climate Change Success Stories from Local Health Departments \(NACCHO\)](#) – Highlighting exemplary efforts at the local level, this collection of success stories celebrates the achievements of health departments in effectively addressing the health impacts of climate change, offering valuable insights, best practices, and actionable strategies for other jurisdictions to replicate and adapt.
7. [Community Leaders Highlight Their Priorities Related to Climate Change, Health, and Equity \(National Academy of Medicine\)](#) – The Climate Communities Network features member experiences and case studies highlighting priorities related to climate change, health, and equity.
8. [Climate Change and Environmental Justice: A Snapshot of Jurisdiction Activities \(ASTHO\)](#) – This report provides an overview of jurisdictional activities related to climate change and environmental justice, offering insights into initiatives and policies aimed at addressing equity concerns in climate action.
9. [Climate and Health Adaptation in Action: Successes of CDC's Climate-Ready States and Cities Initiative \(CDC\)](#) – This resource showcases examples of effective adaptation strategies and interventions implemented by states and cities to address climate-related health risks and build resilience in their communities.

Collaboration and Communication

1. [Climate Safe Neighborhoods Partnership: Environmental Justice and Systemic Racism \(EPA\)](#) – This webinar aims to enhance community resilience to extreme heat and flooding by fostering collaborative partnerships and community-driven solutions. It seeks to empower neighborhoods through capacity-building, technical assistance, and policy advocacy to address climate-related risks and build equitable and sustainable communities.
2. [Paths to Partnership: Building Tribal Partnerships to Advance Environmental Justice \(EPA\)](#) – This webinar provides practical strategies and resources for establishing effective tribal partnerships to advance environmental justice. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration, mutual respect, and shared decision-making in addressing environmental challenges and promoting equitable outcomes for tribal nations.
3. [Defining Roles and Responsibilities of the Health Workforce to Respond to the Climate Crisis \(JAMA Network\)](#) – This journal article explores the critical roles and responsibilities of clinical and public health workers needed to respond to climate events. The article discusses how coordinated collaboration is central to mitigating the effects of climate hazards, including reducing morbidity and mortality.
4. [Equity in Every Frame \(NAACP\)](#) – This video discusses the pivotal role of media in advancing environmental justice for Black communities, highlighting the importance of accurate representation, storytelling, and community engagement in addressing environmental disparities and amplifying marginalized voices.

5. [Communicating on Climate Change and Health: Toolkit for Health Professionals \(WHO\)](#) – This toolkit provides health professionals with evidence-based communication strategies and resources to effectively communicate the health risks of climate change, engage diverse audiences, and mobilize action for climate-resilient health systems and communities.
6. [Drought and Health: A Messaging Framework for Public Health Professionals and Healthcare Providers \(National Integrated Drought Information System\)](#) – Offering guidance for effective communication, this framework equips public health professionals and healthcare providers with strategies to convey the health risks associated with drought effectively, empowering communities to mitigate adverse health outcomes and build resilience in the face of drought conditions.
7. [Climate Justice Alliance \(CJA\)](#) – CJA is a collaborative network of frontline communities, organizations, and movements working together to advance climate justice and build community resilience. Their website provides resources, toolkits, and information on grassroots organizing, policy advocacy, and transformative solutions for climate justice.
8. [How to Frame the Health Impacts of Climate Change \(NACCHO\)](#) – This resource offers strategies for effectively communicating climate change-related information to diverse audiences, emphasizing the importance of framing messages to resonate with public health professionals, policymakers, and the general public.
9. [5 Steps to Effective Climate Communication \(ecoAmerica\)](#) – This fact sheet outlines five steps for effective climate communication. It provides practical guidance and tips for communicating climate change effectively to various audiences, emphasizing the importance of clear messaging and engaging storytelling.
10. [Beat the Heat: Staying Safe in Extreme Conditions \(Public Health Communications Collaborative\)](#) – Health departments can use these social media sample posts to communicate with the public on tips to stay safe in extreme weather conditions.

Policy and Legislation

1. [HB 7611/SB 3043 \(RI 2022\)](#) – Allows the governor of Rhode Island to appoint a member of the public with expertise in environmental justice to the Climate Change Coordinating Council Advisory Board. This legislation enhances representation and expertise in environmental justice within Rhode Island's Climate Change Coordinating Council, ensuring that equity considerations are integrated into climate policy and decision-making processes.
2. [SB 1536 \(OR 2022\)](#) – Directive to use Medicare funds to create an Air Conditioner and Air Filter Deployment program in Oregon. Through the program, the Oregon Health Authority provides eligible Oregonians who are experiencing extreme heat and wildfire smoke with AC units and air filters.
3. [National Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy Act of 2022](#) – This pivotal legislation lays the groundwork for a comprehensive national strategy to enhance climate adaptation and resilience efforts across various sectors, emphasizing proactive measures to address the escalating impacts of climate change and safeguard the well-being of communities nationwide.
4. [State and Federal Environmental Justice Efforts \(National Conference of State Legislatures\)](#) – This resource examines the myriad initiatives and policies at the state and federal levels aimed at

advancing environmental justice, offering insights into current efforts, emerging trends, and opportunities for collaboration and policy innovation.

5. [Equity Action Plan \(EPA\)](#) – EPA's Equity Action Plan outlines strategic priorities and actions to address environmental justice and advance equity in EPA programs, policies, and initiatives. It highlights commitments to community engagement, data transparency, and equitable enforcement to promote environmental justice and protect vulnerable communities.
6. [Pollution and Prejudice Project: Environmental Justice and Systemic Racism \(EPA\)](#) – This video series delves into the historical and contemporary connections between racist land use practices and environmental injustice, examining how discriminatory policies have disproportionately exposed communities of color and marginalized populations to environmental hazards and pollution.
7. [Redlining and the Climate Crisis: Environmental Justice and Systemic Racism \(EPA\)](#) – This video investigates the correlation between historically redlined areas and the prevalence of urban heat islands, highlighting how communities of color and low-income neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by climate impacts due to systemic inequalities.

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