Background
In 2009-2010, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) provided oversight, technical assistance, and support to five state health agencies to build capacity for climate change and public health: California, Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, and New Hampshire. The grantees were awarded up to $90,000 each as part of a pilot program through NCEH/CDC to build state capacity to consider the public health impacts of climate change. Each grantee conducted a needs assessment, and using the results, created a strategic plan to prepare for addressing the climate change within the state.

New Hampshire: Why Immediate Action is Needed – Our Changing Climate
Changes are already occurring in New England’s climate – warmer winters, reduced snowfall, increased rainfall, and rising sea level. These changes are projected to grow in severity and could include other impacts such as stresses on fisheries, decreases in winter recreational activities, alterations to forest quality and productivity, and increases in heat-related illnesses. The 2007 Northeast Climate Impacts Assessment projects that by late in this century, New Hampshire’s climate will more closely resemble that of North Carolina. A failure to act to address climate change is expected to result in increased impacts and costs to New Hampshire¹.

Building Capacity for Climate Change and Public Health
In order to execute a strategic plan, New Hampshire first identified and invited key state and local stakeholders to participate in a climate change and health adaptation needs assessment. The needs assessment was modeled off of the National Public Health Performance Standards (NPHPS), which was adapted to a climate-focused Ten Essential Public Health Services, representing the spectrum of public health activities that should be provided in any jurisdiction. Based upon the lowest scoring climate-related essential services, three strategic priorities were identified each with several goals and objectives designed to address each priority as follows:

¹ New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services for the Climate Change Policy Task Force, 2009. 
The needs assessment results demonstrated that while New Hampshire’s state public health system (SPHS) already has much of the capacity in place to address climate-related health threats, there is little recognition that climate change is specifically a driver of public health, and there is little or no coordinated effort to modify existing systems to address climate-related health impacts or focus on climate change in public health planning. The needs assessment also identified numerous existing activities, systems, and processes already in place that are capable of assisting New Hampshire’s SPHS in climate change and public health adaptation planning, preparedness, and response. However, these existing resources have not yet been adapted to focus on climate change and health preparedness, and this needs assessment represents the first activity to develop some coordination related to adaptive or preparedness interventions in New Hampshire. The results from the needs assessment were used to inform the strategic plan and implement a communication strategy to raise awareness and training for public health professionals and policy makers.

**Challenges vs. Successes**
There were several challenges encountered that caused the project team to modify the original project plan to accommodate unanticipated events and barriers, including limited needs assessment tools and data collection methodology, side stepping the political nature of the topic, and limited future funding. Despite these challenges, New Hampshire successfully conducted a needs assessment using the ten essential public health services and public health performance standards, developed a three to five year strategic plan, and developed and distributed critical information on climate change to key...
2009-2010 Building State Capacity for Climate Change and Public Health Grant
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stakeholders, including health agency personnel, senior-level state agency and business leaders, local health officials, and state policy makers. In addition to successfully meeting the objectives of the grant, there were several other notable achievements including stakeholder involvement and participation, reaching and involving new audiences, and linking public health to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Recommendations for Best Practices

1. **Climate-Specific Public Health Essential Services**: New Hampshire created a modified version of the CDC’s NPHPS to specifically evaluate the state public health system’s capacity to address the health impacts of climate change. While the tool developed provides a reasonable and accurate assessment, the modified tool has not yet been evaluated by the NPHPS program and has not been validated or officially approved for use by experts in the field. It is recommended that coordination with the CDC NPHPS program be developed to evaluate, standardize, and validate the modified tool prior to its further use.

2. **Inclusion of All Public Health Stakeholders**: The entire New Hampshire SPHS, not just the state public health agency, was included in the needs assessment and strategic planning process. This was beneficial, especially for small states like New Hampshire, where public health services are typically delivered in a collaborative manner with partners in other agencies, local governments, non-profit organizations and businesses. It is recommended to identify and involve a diverse group of SPHS stakeholders.

3. **Importance of Personal Contact in Involving Key Stakeholders**: Initially many stakeholders were not knowledgeable about the relationship between public health and climate change, and therefore did not initially accept the invitation to participate in the strategic planning process. To increase participation each stakeholder was personally contacted to explain the issue, describe the needs assessment process and the required commitment, and explain how they and their existing programs have critical roles to play in addressing and preventing climate-related health issues. This dramatically increased participation of key stakeholders in the SPHS, and encouraged involvement and enthusiastic participation. This approach of individualized outreach is recommended.

**Moving Forward**

Based on the progress made thus far, New Hampshire will aim to make all documents and materials developed through this pilot grant available on one webpage. New Hampshire will continue to build new
partnerships. For the 2010-2011 budget year, New Hampshire has received a mini-grant to expand the initial climate change capacity building efforts.

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