



STATEMENT OF POLICY

Addressing the Changing Climate Impact on Public Health

Mission The mission of NYSPHA is to promote and protect the public's health through professional development, networking, advocacy, and education.

Vision Strengthening public health and taking action to make New York the healthiest state.

Problem Statement

Climate change and its impact on human health is an undeniable existential crisis that threatens human health through a myriad of direct and indirect factors and constitutes a public health emergency. Poor air quality, heat-related illness, vector and waterborne illnesses, and flooding and other extreme weather events directly impact health. In the last century, the temperature in most parts of New York State increased approximately two degrees Fahrenheit, impacting all populations across the state. Additionally, climate change is expected to worsen existing health disparities because racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to live and work in environmentally vulnerable situations and to be less resilient to climate changes. -The changes in weather and climate will also unduly stress the public health infrastructure and hospital systems. Urgent actions across multiple sectors of the public health system and beyond are needed to address this emergency.

Position Statement

The New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA) urges the public health system to take action in support of policies addressing climate change. NYSPHA supports the transition to evidence-based and sustainable methods to mitigate the wide range of the harmful impacts of climate change. Joint and sustained efforts by public institutions, private organizations, and individuals are critical.

NYSPHA recommends:

1. Advocacy, education, and the dissemination of information on the health impacts of climate change to health care leaders, policymakers, elected officials, business and industry leaders, workers including farmers, community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, and the general public.

2. Increased funding for the state and local public health infrastructure to mitigate the effects of the climate change crisis.
3. Increasing the capacity of existing public health and emergency preparedness programs to address the impact of extreme weather events and more gradual environmental changes related to climate change.
4. Advocacy for evidence-based policies at federal, state, and local levels that will mitigate the impacts of climate change and support a fair transition for the workforce into more climate-friendly employment.
5. Supporting the transition to clean, renewable energy, which includes renewable electricity, green housing, and transportation, and building climate-resilient, carbon sustainable health systems.
6. Investing in technical assistance and training for local, community-based climate action projects such as the use of public transportation, carpooling, using locally sourced materials and food, and switching to environmentally friendly renewable energy.
7. Increased funding for research on climate change related impacts on human health.
8. Collaborating with federal, state, and local governments, public and private stakeholders, and environmental design professionals to develop sustainable policies to address issues such as wastewater management, access to clean drinking water, stable food supply chain population mobility, community development, conservation measures such as coastal protection and adaptation measures, efforts to protect and conserve New York's unique Adirondack Park, and emissions to minimize and mitigate the short and long-term risk of climate change.

Justification

According to the World Health Organization, climate change is a significant public health problem (World Health Organization, 2021). People across the United States are experiencing the health impacts of increasingly severe weather patterns and the resulting flooding, wildfires, drought, heat waves, and sanitation emergencies (American Public Health Association, 2019). An increase in extreme temperatures can lead to a surge in fatalities, injuries, mental health issues, and forced migrations. Climate change can lead to increases in respiratory diseases; diseases carried by fleas, ticks and mosquitos; and pathogens in water and food as well as higher pollen concentrations and longer pollen seasons. The impact of climate change on food production, quality, distribution, and prices may lead to dietary changes and food insecurity and food scarcity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

The changing climate weakens many social determinants of good health. People that are affected by poverty, racism, violence, and social isolation will be impacted greatly by changes in climate. Vulnerable populations are at a disproportionately greater risk of adverse consequences, including people living in low-income and disadvantaged communities, older adults, those with underlying and chronic health conditions, women, children, persons with disabilities, individuals with mental illness, and ethnic minorities. Health care agencies – national, state, and local –

should develop a plan to assist and support these populations in the event of adverse climate and weather events (Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, 2019).

In New York State, the annual average temperature has risen about 2.4 degrees Fahrenheit since 1970 (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 2021). New York has seen more frequent and heavy rainstorms, causing the sea level to rise about one inch every decade. The rising water results in beach and shoreline erosion, coastal flooding, and submerged lowlands, which affect the ecosystems of the Atlantic Ocean, Hudson River, and the Long Island Sound. The rising temperatures in New York State have seen an increase in vector borne diseases, such Lyme disease, and the potential for increases in mosquito-borne diseases as temperature increase and increased precipitation increases the ranges of mosquito vectors, such as those that carry West Nile and Zika virus infections. The higher temperatures increase the pollen season that results in an increase in length and severity of respiratory problems (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2016).

The New York City metropolitan area has a high-density population, diverse ecosystem, and a large built infrastructure that is being impacted by the climate crisis. Climate change will affect the wetlands, disrupting the habitats of the ecosystem, the water supply and demand, and the energy demand. Health will be affected through frequent and prolonged heat waves, which could result in heat stress morbidity, especially among older adults (Center for International Earth Science Information Network, 2005).

New York State's ClimAID analysis concluded that the changing climate could cost approximately \$10 billion dollars yearly by 2050. The costs impact all economic sectors: agriculture and dairy production, transportation, natural resources, energy infrastructure, and tourism. Through the Community Risk and Resiliency Act (CRRRA), New York State ensures that all applicants to state programs take into account future climate risks, including wastewater treatment plants, hazardous waste facilities, bulk storage facilities, oil and gas drilling, and state acquisition of land (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 2021).

Climate change has a significant impact on New York State's food supply chain, a large component of the state's economy. The state has over 34,000 farms, occupying one quarter of its land area and contributing over \$4.5 billion to the economy. Farmers' crops, livestock, and pest control will be affected, and they will need to adapt to longer growing seasons with warmer temperatures. (New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, 2022)

Climate-related consequences will vary based on geography, topography, and unique community populations. It is recommended that each local health department prepare for the impacts of climate change using an approach tailored to their communities and provide tools and resources to residents and key stakeholders (APHA, 2019).

References

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Record of Action

02/08/22 – Adopted by the NYSPHA Policy and Advocacy Committee (PAC)

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