



# Safeguarding Public Health

## Background & Relevance

Local governments play a crucial role in addressing the intersection of climate change and public health within their communities. As frontline responders, they implement policies and initiatives to mitigate climate-related health risks and build local resilience to various hazards and challenges. Taking meaningful action at the climate-health nexus creates many “sticky” challenges for local governments.

Even though the need for decisive action is clear, several factors stand in the way of progress, including constrained resources, data gaps, siloes, inequities, as well as the sheer scale of the work that local governments need to do.

ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability USA’s June Insights and Exchange webinar speakers explored frameworks, tools, approaches, and their experiences working at the climate-health nexus.

**1**

**Cross-disciplinary collaboration, equitable engagement, and a whole-of-government approach are essential to solving public health challenges posed by climate change.** Achieving these aims requires building networks and relationships ahead of time. Focus on early and sustained engagement before disasters strike to avoid losing momentum or being caught unprepared.

**2**

**Use existing tools, frameworks, and platforms as jumping-off points, not prescriptions.** Always look for ways to bring creativity and adaptability to your approach in a way that resonates with your community (e.g., short videos, games).

**3**

**Do not lose sight of climate impacts on community and staff mental health.** Climate grief, guilt, anxiety, and apathy are all normal responses to the climate crisis. Make space for staff and community members to talk about their feelings about climate change. Use your work as a platform to raise awareness about existing resources, such as local support groups and Climate Cafes.



Adrienne Arsht-  
Rockefeller Foundation  
Resilience Center



# Why Is It Important?

The public health costs of climate change are rising rapidly in the U.S. More frequent and intense heat waves, wildfire smoke, storms, floods, and other hazards are taxing public health infrastructure already strained by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Scientists expect these impacts to get worse. Increased wildfires in the mid-to late-century period could cause hazardous small particulate matter (PM2.5) concentration in the Pacific Northwest to double or even triple in August and September.
- Studies project that by 2050, labor-productivity losses in the U.S. will rise to half a trillion dollars each year.
- As with other impacts of climate change, environmental justice communities often face the worst impacts with the fewest resources.

For local governments, a climate-informed approach to public health can save lives, improve physical health, and enhance mental well-being. Adding a public health lens to climate work may engage more constituents than would be involved in climate work alone. In a capacity-limited environment, working across departments to tackle climate and public health challenges is both more efficient and cost-effective. Prevention is crucial.

## Extreme Heat Resources



### Heat Action Platform

The Heat Action Platform is a living, engagement-oriented tool for city officials, practitioners, and financial institutions to find guidance, both existing resources and tailor-made solutions, on reducing extreme heat's human and economic impacts at the regional or municipal level.

### Heatwave Survival Minecraft Game

The Minecraft Extreme Heat Series can teach students about heat resilience in an engaging, innovative way. Players learn to recognize the symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke through in-game scenarios and how to respond with simple solutions like electric fans and hydration.



# Extreme Heat Resources Cont.

## **Heat Season Campaign**

The Arsht-Rock Resilience Center designed the # HeatSeason campaign to change the way we talk about heat and help people better understand their vulnerability to heat-related health risks.

## **United States Extreme Heat Economic Research**

With climate change expected to make periods of extreme heat more frequent, widespread, and severe in the coming decades, Extreme Heat: The Economic and Social Consequences for the United States—a new report produced by the Atlantic Council’s Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center with analysis conducted by Vivid Economics—quantifies the impacts of heat under current and future conditions.

## **National Integrated Heat Health Information System - Heat.gov**

Heat-related illnesses and deaths are largely preventable with proper planning, education, and action. Heat.gov serves as the premier source of heat and health information for the nation to reduce the health, economic, and infrastructural impacts of extreme heat. Heat.gov is the web portal for the National Integrated Heat Health Information System (NIHHIS).

## **CDC Heat Risk**

Heat risk map searchable by zip code to help residents get the HeatRisk for the current week and learn about the actions they can take to keep themselves and others safe.

## **CDC Heat and Health Tracker**

Heat poses significant and increasing risks to public health across the United States. This dashboard allows users to explore their community’s heat exposure, related health outcomes, and assets that can protect people during heat events.

## **Climate & Health Resources**



### **CDC Climate and Health Resources**

These resources for public health professionals include guidance documents, toolkits, and other materials to use in climate adaptation planning and implementation.





# Climate Mental Health Resources

## **Climate Aware Therapist Directory**

Climate-aware therapists are professionally-trained psychotherapists who recognize that the climate crisis is both a global threat to all life on Earth and a deeply personal threat to the mental and physical well-being—the sense of safety, meaning, and purpose—of each individual, family, and community on the planet.

## **Climate Cafes by Climate Psychology Alliance North America**

Climate Cafes provide an informal, open, respectful, confidential space to safely share emotional responses and reactions related to the climate and environmental emergency (i.e. a “container”). Climate Cafe facilitation training includes an explication of the psycho-social principles on which climate cafes are based, provides a short experiential Climate Cafe, suggests a toolkit of practical resources, and incorporates discussions on practical aspects of organizing and facilitating.

## **Emotional Resilience Toolkit for Climate Work**

A handbook designed to provide emotional support, resources, and tools for eco-anxiety, grief, and the range of feelings that accompany climate work.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). It may not be used for any commercial purpose. Any non-commercial use of this material must provide attribution to ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability USA.