

NH DPHS Climate & Health Advisory Council Meeting
A Time of Transition: The Status of Climate & Health at DPHS
Building Resilience Against Climate Effects (BRACE)
December 2, 2021
NEXT Meeting: MAY 2022

Meeting Notes from the 10th Meeting of the NH DPHS Climate and Health Advisory Meeting

Held on 12/2/21, 8:30-11:00 AM via a Zoom remote format

The following is a summary of the discussion during the December 2nd, 2021 Climate & Health Advisory Council meeting. This is not a summary of the formal presentation. For that, slides are provided for your review. A total of 17 people participated from around NH in a Zoom meeting. A contact list of attendees is provided.

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You can find the DPHS Climate and Health Program's website at: www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/climate/

Keynote Talk: A Time of Transition, with Matt Cahillane

Matt provided an update on the DPHS Climate and Health Program's funding status. NH DPHS put in a funding proposal in July 2021, yet the response was 'Approved but Unfunded' (ABU) which means that they liked the approach but it did not score high enough. If additional funds become available via appropriations, then the project may go forward.

The meeting today is to discuss what has been accomplished in the following four areas; Workforce Capacity building, Communications and Outreach, Interventions to reduce weather/climate related health risks, and Evaluation and Reporting on findings from our research. A set of slides is available that covers these four topic areas.

After the presentation, a Zoom poll was launched, yet ran into technical difficulties. The poll questions were reviewed and discussed. The poll may be re-launched via Survey Monkey so that all stakeholders can provide input to the process. In summary, if no funding is available, then DPHS will need to close down the Climate Program, but plans to maintain the existing website and may be able to provide some limited technical support.

General Questions

Q: Steve Crawford: Does this group have any statutory recognition. What is the value or Return on Investment (ROI) on like-minded people working on a mandate?

A: This advisory group doesn't have any legislative mandate other than that found for the general Duties for DHHS under [RSA 125:9](#) ("Take cognizance of the interests of health and life among the people."). Each town must have a hazard vulnerability plan to prepare it for natural and human caused disasters (if they want to access FEMA funds). The Obama Administration proposed a requirement to

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assess climate hazards as part of FEMA plans, yet is now only a voluntary option. For example: The findings of the 2016 New England Heat study influenced the NWS to change the temperature level it releases heat warnings to the public. Based on the executive and congressional makeup at present, a legislative mandate to identify climate hazards is not on the horizon. That said, we should work on identifying weather and climate hazards.

Poll Questions & Discussion:

1. Workforce Capacity

Christin D'Ovidio added that there is enthusiasm for trainings and the use of educational materials. She has produced materials for Tick Free NH that are highly requested.

Henry Underwood, SW Regional Planning Commission, said the guide book developed early on in the program was very helpful. It contained useable templates and good background information.

Moving forward – The Climate and Health Program will provide minimal support and will add the materials to the NH Climate Program webpage.

2. Communications and Outreach

Bruce Clendenning said the social media graphics have been used among partners in NH and beyond and shared with his network.

Moving forward- the program will maintain website and provide monthly updates and other communication.

3. Community Interventions

Tanya Dumont, [NH DHHS Asthma Control Program Manager](#), complimented the team on the changes of what qualifies as a dangerous heat day. Well done! It was hard to devise the methodology.

Katie Bush added that Matt was very proactive in providing mini funds to build local capacity in NH. Early interventions in the Upper Valley and Nashua focused on extreme heat to determine how to reach the elderly and homebound. This all hazards approach focused paid off recently with the Covid response because people now have the knowledge to reach vulnerable populations. Matt stressed that interventions have to be local - we have the expertise and knowledge to engage stakeholders; this lets us effect change.

This has become a model for other public health programs. Planning commissions and public health now have stronger coordination.

Matt added that at first the mini funds to each group were small with \$20,000 to four groups for two years. Then they changed the contracts to give \$40,000 per year for two years to two groups. Ideally, the program should provide \$60-80k a year for two years but the program lacks the funding for that level of intervention, and the team is still learning a lot from this 'seed funding'.

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Q: What does this group want and need from a state public health agency in the future?

A: Help with finding the right funding niche

If new CDC or other federal funds are not found, then moving forward the DPHS Climate program will provide minimal support for interventions.

4. Evaluation and Research

Steve Crawford said the research is personally interesting. The reports spark new thinking. He has not necessarily incorporated the research into his work in agriculture.

Joe Ayotte, USGS, conducted research on hydrology. He added some information about current research on effects on aquifers and bottled water extraction. Recently he received funding for a project to look at Sacco River water extraction impacts by Nestle bottling. Research supported by Matt on changing climate and impact on hydro was seminal in getting this funding. One area needing more investigation is the impact of temperature changes on growing seasons and how it shifts water levels and the period of time between re-charge. He said that while NH is wetter - we are also conversely experiencing longer periods of draught.

Joe also identified the need for a model or an easy to read dashboard of impacts. Matt encouraged continued conversation on this topic, and asked if this work could evolve into an online data portal/dashboard. The online data currently available is cumbersome. A new format could be used by communities to better prepare for impacts to infrastructure.

Janine Marr suggested a need for a community intervention to allow communities to build on Joe's data. His data is available at; [Hydrologic response model report](#)

Janine added it would be helpful to pull local data on the Monadnock region to project out case studies. This will help communities prepare and build infrastructure. She said the region is getting Spring a whole month early.

Moving forward – The EPHT program may be able to add more hazard data to the DHHS data portal and may study cold injury.

Q: Is it possible to look at different funding sources from the private sector?

A: The current Tick-Safe train-the-trainer project is a combination of private and public resources. Tick Free NH is supported by a private donor.

A: Bruce added it is not a conflict for a public entity to accept private funds. It is important to find the right fit. Some of the NOFA announcements are for health equity that has not been a fit for NH due to a smaller population of ethnic and racial minorities.

A: Joseph Ayotte received USGS funds looking at private wells and economic status. There is variability in water and its impact on vulnerable communities.

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Partner Updates

Janine Marr, Antioch center for [Climate Preparedness and Community Resilience](#) (CCPCR) – A post-doctoral position working on climate issues, and a recently published report [How do we build community resilience to disasters in a changing climate?](#), they are creating toolkits for various populations on ways to build resilience. When they published the article they had 2 floods in her area – creating an opportunity to apply the science immediately. She worried about her friends and older people in the community. She used this as an opportunity to further study the various impacts of different types of floods.

Her organization wants to establish a baseline of partnerships to increase intervention and use it as a model for other parts of the state and New England on how to build resilience to extreme precipitation/events. One toolkit will be used for partnerships and networking within disaster preparedness response. While the second toolkit looks at social capital and cohesion and ability to feel connected in the community. Antioch focused on social media as a way to communicate about these materials and are excited to share with partners on how to figure out messaging ‘in the moment’.

Bruce Clendenning, [The Nature Conservancy](#) (NH Chapter), Bruce talked about NH legislative initiatives. It is early and things are chaotic. The language is being developed, so stay tuned. NH Public Utilities Commission had a very [significant decision](#) that will reverse recent progress on regional energy efficiency efforts. There are legal appeals in response to the decision and likely legislative action. Matt added there are 2 bills to establish a heat stress committee focused on heat hazards and how workers are adapting to heat.

On the federal side, there is a lot of movement. The federal [Infrastructure Bill](#) is for traditional grey infrastructure, however, there are funds for energy and climate. It is very exciting – more than 200 billion dollars resulting in reduced emissions such as cleaner transportation efforts for cars, bus, electric grid and other efforts. These efforts will address some equity and health issues. NH stands to get 2 – 6 billion dollars.

Energy and Climate, [Build Back Better Bill](#) – there are many projects that impact energy and climate and health. Tax credits have been proposed for consumers to buy more efficient products. This bill is still in play. Bruce encouraged involvement with NH delegation.

Katie Bush, [NH DPHS Environmental Public Health Tracking](#) said they are looking at heat and cold hospitalizations surveillance study. They are looking at trends that bring people to the hospitals during heat events so they can better communicate to people at higher risk of exposure to protect themselves. 26 states are funded to track this information. Research questions include:

- How are people coded before they go into the hospital? How were they coded in the hospital and what happens after?

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This can be used to track imminent outbreaks (i.e. flu) and heat and cold outcomes. Eventually the data can be operationalized and information can get distributed in real time to people working in areas of increased risk.

Next, NH DES' will be to focus on asthma. They are going to query the text of hospital admission notes to collect occupations because where you work/what you do can increase your risk for certain health outcomes including heat and cold. Hopefully we will be able to demonstrate the benefit of tracking data so we can build out data dashboards on temperatures, days above/below thresholds. This is an area where partners can stay in touch so we don't duplicate efforts. There are opportunities to pull data into the dashboard from different sources using APIs.

There is a competitive grant renewal this coming year. Health equity will be a central theme. There are legislative guidelines that can restrict sharing data unless the situation is acute. We need to show that environmental impacts are acute.

Bob Friedlander, [NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action](#). A retired oncologist, Bob started this new, non-partisan organization to engage healthcare workers and educate them about the impacts of climate on health. His goal is to activate the healthcare sector who are trusted messengers to send important messages and influence sustainable principles into clinical practice. The organization is a state affiliate of the Medical Society Consortium of Climate Health, which provides funding and advocacy resources. They already have a Board of Advisors, Board of Directors, and 6 working groups (education, children's health, climate justice, advocacy, policy, behavioral health) as well as 1,500 health care workers in their database. This is not a physician-centric organization - they have doctors, social workers, nurses, etc. They just submitted a project ECHO grant with the NH Medical Society and Dartmouth and are working with faculty at Dartmouth, UNH, Plymouth, Harvard School of Public Health, and George Mason on possible research projects.

They will be sending a letter to senior elected officials. 600 people have signed and it will be delivered this weekend. Also 19 healthcare associations in the state signed it (Medical Society, Public Health, Nursing, Psychiatric, etc.) affirming scientific basis between climate and health. They are also doing publicity launch on 12/5/21 at 10:00 am in front of the NH State House.

Q: Beverly Drouin asked how to reach and educate busy healthcare providers?

A: Bob suggested reaching various professionals by starting the education early in the pre-clinical, clinical and elective curriculum. Bob is reaching out to students early for civic engagement. They have been offering evening learning sessions that are recorded and posted on the website. They are also developing Project ECHO on climate and health to influence a whole team.

Q: What is the largest source of your funding?

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A: Bob answered they are the state affiliate and as a result they received a \$20,000 through the Medical Society. They are planning a membership drive. They are an all-volunteer organization.

Joe Fontaine, NH [DES Air Resources Division](#), Air Resources and Coastal Programs, works towards emission reductions across various NE states. The biggest sector to focus on now is transportation by increasing electric vehicles under the RGGI cap and further reduction. Visit the [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative \(RGGI\)](#) to provide comments on how the program can be improved and track their progress. The air resources division released RFP to create and manage the infrastructure system for electric vehicle charging station along major roads.

Kristen Howard, NH DES Coastal Program (delivered via email):

We are very lucky to have LOTS of stuff going on right now! I wish I had time to summarize but I don't think I could do it justice. Here are a couple bullets:

- DES is releasing a statewide climate science update soon (Sherry Godlewski is a good person to ask about that if you aren't following it)
- We are working on a RFP to distribute ARPA funding for climate/coastal resilience projects
- We are hiring several new positions focused on coastal resilience, water quality and habitat
- We recently completed our annual coastal resilience grant round and selected projects are moving forward with contracting (to be announced formally in 2022)
- We are partnering with the Seacoast Public Health Network on the Coastal Neighbors Technical Assistance Program that was recently funded by NOAA
- We are working to scope a contract with a consultant to develop a statewide hydrodynamic coastal flood/sea level rise model that will inform decisions about infrastructure and emergency management

Brian Eaton, Homeland Security (update via email), New Hampshire Department of Safety, Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management has been in communication with communities, non-profits, and state agencies throughout 2021 regarding funding opportunities for hazard mitigation planning and projects.

- HSEM recently awarded the Town of Swanzey with a \$800,000.00 FEMA FFY 2019 Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) grant for slope stabilization along a very integral road in the town of Swanzey.
- The PDM grant program was renamed to BRIC, however it has retained much of the same objectives and eligibility. HSEM will apply for BRIC FFY 2021 funding in the end of January 2022. This application will include approximately \$600,000.00 worth of funding for approximately 70 communities to update their hazard mitigation plans. We hope to receive FEMA's approvals and awards for BRIC FFY 2020 within the next couple months. We anticipate the BRIC FFY 2020 award will consist of approximately \$300,000.00 worth of funding to update approximately 30 community's hazard mitigation plans, and hopefully a couple hazard mitigation projects for localized flood risk reduction efforts. [Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities \(BRIC\)](#)
- Additionally, HSEM was notified this summer of approximately \$10 million in funding available through the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) as a result of the COVID-19

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disaster declaration, DR-4516. Additionally, disaster declarations DR-4622 and DR-4624 occurring this summer in southwest New Hampshire (as a result of flooding and severe storms) will open additional HMGP funding opportunities. HSEM will continue to work with communities, non-profits, and state agencies on hazard mitigation opportunities with a goal of utilizing all funding available to ensure our state advances resiliency against natural and human caused hazards.

- Any questions may be directed towards our shared mailbox: hazmitplanning@DOS.NH.GOV

Stephen Crawford, NH Department of Agriculture.

- Early discussion of novel wildlife vaccine against Lyme disease, targeting immunization of mice. Initial discussion with vaccine manufacturer, DHHS, F&G. Approval of vaccine by USDA is months away, at the earliest.
- Department received legislative approval for animal data management system and animal disease data entry specialist. These are significant (and years in the making) because there is no current (i.e. efficient and usable), state-based system for capturing and analyzing all of the domestic animal disease surveillance information we generate and/or receive. This is a short (hiring person) - to medium (procuring and implementing database)-term project with longer-term return on investment.
- DES Solid Waste proposed composting rules; [RULEMAKING NOTICE: Amendments to Composting Facility Requirements | NH Department of Environmental Services](#). These have been in process for some time, and DES has thoughtfully engaged Agriculture during that process. Notable to agriculture, the proposed rules accommodate the evolving needs of livestock owners for carcass disposal. The proposed rules acknowledge the reality that if composting is not a reasonable option for a farmer, animals are still going to die but the carcasses may not necessarily be managed as responsibly.
- Discussing wild waterfowl influenza testing results. DHHS, F&G, USDA Wildlife Services. Are these truly migratory birds or year-round residents? Germane to agriculture, we are working on education of poultry owners re. risks of wild bird exposure. There are zoonotic interests, too.
- Ongoing discussion of SARS-CoV-2 in wildlife. DHHS, F&G, USDA Wildlife Services, Implications for both zoonotic transmission and wildlife reservoirs.
- State-University laboratory capacity working group has morphed into several smaller projects, including ongoing discussion of how/whether to stand up a One Health-focused group.

Additional Resources:

- [NH DPHS, Climate and Health Program](#)
- [USGS, Simulated hydrologic response to climate change during the 21st century in New Hampshire](#)
- [NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action](#)
- [NH DPHS, Environmental Health Tracking Program](#)