HELPING COMMUNITIES ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE FOR A HEALTHIER NEW MEXICO

New Mexico must take action to protect the health of its people from the effects of extreme weather and other aspects of climate change.

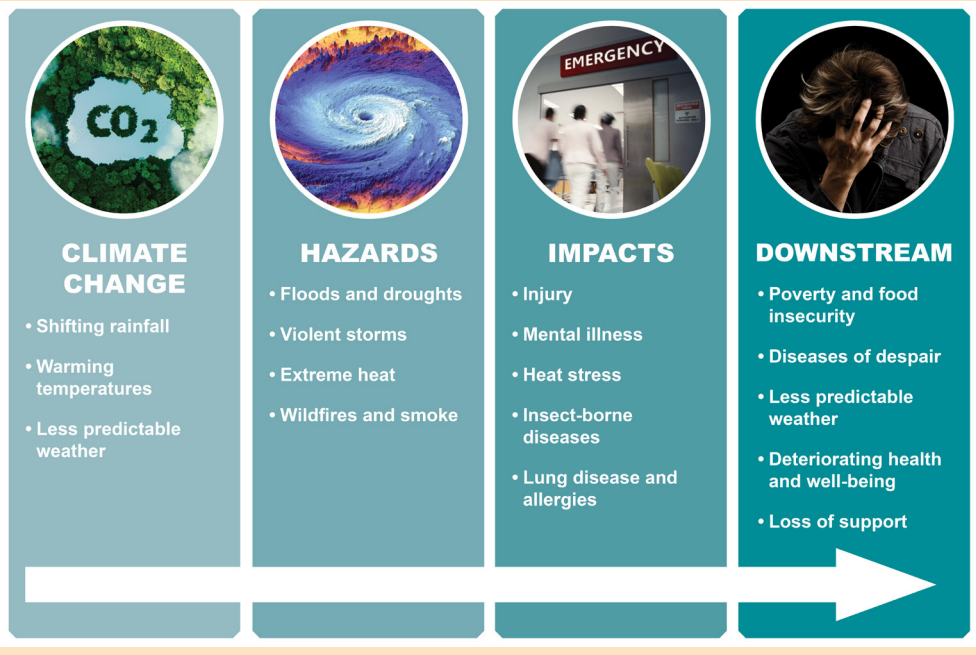
THE PROBLEM

Climate change is increasingly harming the health of New Mexicans, and the rate of extreme weather events caused by climate change such as heat waves, drought and flooding – along with wildfires and air pollution – is quickly accelerating. Over the next 50 years, the state will see an increased risk of drought, leading to dryer soil, less snowpack, stressed vegetation, and a substantial decline in river flows.[1]

These warmer conditions and changes in precipitation have allowed the mosquitoes that can carry and transmit Zika, Chikungunya, dengue fever, and yellow fever to become endemic to New Mexico,[2] increasing the risk of "explosive epidemics" in the state.[3]

New Mexico also ranks as the state most vulnerable to climate change across a variety of social, demographic, and environmental vulnerability measures.[4] New Mexico's communities of color, older adults, young children, people with disabilities, and families earning low incomes are most likely to be hurt by these circumstances and most likely to suffer serious, immediate, and long-term health consequences.

Protecting New Mexicans from the ravages of extreme weather, food and water scarcity, air pollution, and other climate-related problems will support health equity and make our state stronger. We must take action to increase climate resiliency before the state's next extreme weather event.



BY THE NUMBERS

- New Mexico now has an average of **50 more days** of extreme wildfire risk conditions (hot, dry, windy) than in 1970.[5]
- New Mexico's northern mountain region now has **60 additional days** of extreme wildfire risk than in 1970 – the largest regional increase in the U.S.[6]
- **More than 1%** of the entire state burned in the summer of 2022.[7] The number of acres burned is expected to increase as conditions become even drier and hotter.[8]
- New Mexico saw an **18% increase** in respiratory emergency room visits during the wildfire season, compared to previous years.[9]
- Average temperatures in New Mexico have already increased **2 degrees**, and are on course to double by 2070, if not sooner, due to the greenhouse gas we have already released into the atmosphere.[10]
- The number of emergency room visits for heat-related illness in New Mexico **more than doubled** between 2009 and 2019.[11]

SOLUTIONS

New Mexico can best protect the health of its people from the effects of extreme weather and other aspects of climate change by putting in place a comprehensive plan of action. This plan must ensure that public health experts collaborate with agencies that are responsible for emergency responses. This plan should include the following.

- Create a **Climate and Public Health Program** at the Department of Health, to provide the capacity necessary to support this important work and help improve interagency collaboration focused on health equity, climate mitigation, and adaptation in New Mexico.*
- Establish a **Public Health and Climate Resiliency Fund** to assist local communities in preparing for and responding to public health emergencies related to climate change and extreme weather, as determined by county and tribal emergency managers and/or health councils.
- Ensure the state has put in place **concrete, coordinated, and cohesive action plans** that support local communities in building health resiliency to future climate impacts.
- Provide **climate and health expertise** to assist local community planning in making health-informed decisions about current and future climate impacts; integrating the latest climate science into emergency preparedness programs; and accessing federal funds for climate adaptation.
- Facilitate **meaningful community engagement**, especially with the communities most harmed by climate change.

*13 states have established Climate and Health Programs to provide expertise, coordination and funding needed to help communities adapt to current and accelerating impacts of climate change. CDC's Climate-Ready States & Cities Initiative.

Endnotes

1. *Climate Change In New Mexico Over the Next 50 years: Impacts on Water Resources*, NM Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, March 2022
2. "Accelerating invasion potential of disease vector Aedes aegypti under climate change," *Nature*, May 1, 2020 and "Important Mosquito Species Found in Albuquerque," New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH), Oct. 16, 2018
3. "A new mosquito is stalking New Mexico. Is the state ready?," Source NM, Sept. 12, 2022
4. *Climate Change & Health: Assessing State Preparedness*, Trust for America's Health, page 41
5. *Fire Weather: Heat, dryness, and wind are driving wildfires in the Western U.S.*, Climate Central, Aug. 25, 2021
6. Ibid.
7. InciWeb, interagency all-risk incident information management system, accessed 10/25/22, https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/
8. Fourth National Climate Assessment Report - Chapter 25: Southwest Region, U.S. Global Change Research Program, November 2018
9. Environmental Public Health Tracking Program, NMDOH
10. State Climate Summaries 2022: New Mexico, NOAA's National Center for Environmental Information, page 5
11. National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed 10/21/2022, www.cdc.gov/ephtracking.

Nov. 2022 | NEW MEXICO VOICES FOR CHILDREN