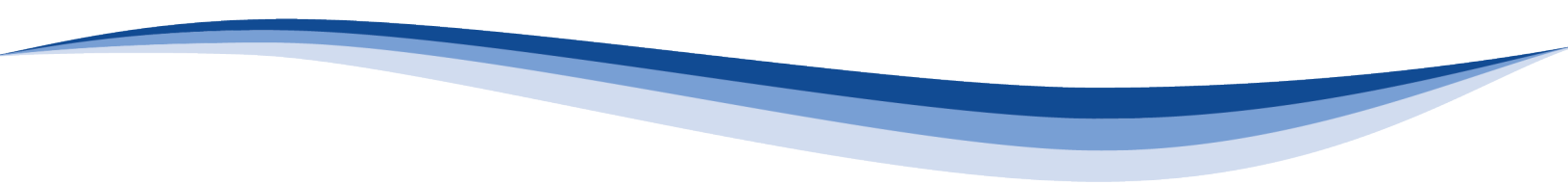


2019 GLISA Small Grant White Paper

Expanding Awareness and Capacity to Utilize Public Health Law to Advance Climate Adaptation and Mitigation in the Great Lakes Region

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Background and Approach

When the Network for Public Health Law (Network) applied to the GLISA Small Grants Program in 2019, the pathways by which climate change adversely affected the health of individuals and the population were not well understood among public health practitioners. Similarly, there was little awareness of the legal and policy mechanisms that can contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation.

Authoritative climate information can be difficult to locate and interpret at the local, state, and regional level, making it hard for local health departments to identify climate-related health threats. Pathways for adverse health impacts include extreme heat, air pollution, storms and floods, droughts and wildfires, vector-borne illness, waterborne and foodborne disease, food insecurity and nutrition, and associated health. Among those who were aware of the significant impacts climate change is having and will have on human health, the Network believed that many would benefit from a deeper appreciation of how law and policy can be tailored to prevent and mitigate adverse outcomes. Many local health departments seek to serve as the “chief health strategist” for their community, which means they need tools to help them design and implement health-related laws as well as resources to help them learn about laws enforced by other government agencies. We believed that collaborative training by GLISA and the Network would meet this need by helping public health professionals to utilize climate information to make informed choices from among evidence-based legal solutions to address the health impacts of climate change.

The project team was led by the Network for Public Health Law and GLISA, in partnership with a number of public health associations in the Great Lakes region, including the Great Lakes Public Health Coalition and the Wisconsin Public Health Association. Initially, we had hoped that one or more public health departments or public health associations in Michigan would be partners on a specific training, and are hopeful that this may yet happen, after the close of the initial grant period. During the grant period, the Minnesota Public Health Association emerged as a partner in this project, in part due to our collaboration with the Great Lakes Public Health Coalition. GLISA provided resources and training related to climate trends in the region, and their connection with adverse health impacts. The Network provided training and created resources related to law and policy strategies to mitigate climate change and alleviate the adverse human health impacts. The public health association partners provided outreach and disseminated training announcements among their members, as well as providing the web platform, technical support, webinar facilitation, and collaborating on webinar planning.

After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project pivoted from its intention to provide in-person trainings to a focus on web-based trainings. This provided a lower-cost way to reach public health professionals and place fewer demands upon their time, since no travel was required. The project ultimately provided one in-person training, in the form of a pre-conference workshop prior to the Climate and Health Equity Summit hosted by the Network in October 2022. We also created a set of frequently asked questions, with information related to climate trends, health impacts, and law and policy strategies as deliverables for the project.

Relationships

The Network had no prior relationship with GLISA, but has benefited greatly from GLISA support for the project. GLISA staff have provided valuable scientific expertise and insights, including in integrating climate analyses with public health analyses, such as by drawing upon the most recent Fourth U.S. National Climate Assessment (2018) and Climate and Health Assessment (2016). While the majority of attendees at the pre-conference workshop at the Climate and Health Equity Summit in October 2022 in Minneapolis, MN, were from the Great Lakes region, a few attendees from outside the Great Lakes expressed interest in connecting with climate research centers in their own regions. The Network values the opportunity to begin both institutional and personal relationships with GLISA staff, and we look forward to continuing the relationship.

STAKEHOLDER NETWORKS ENGAGED

The Network's partners and stakeholders, including public health associations, health departments, and public health practitioners have indicated appreciation for the trainings as well as eagerness for the FAQ document. The Network has previously had strong relationships with public health stakeholders, but the partnership with GLISA has helped the Network to cement those relationships in the context of climate change, and to increase the value we are able to add by increasing access to authoritative climate science for the region.

Approximately 35 people attended the pre-conference workshop. Participants were drawn primarily from state and local health departments (including public health practitioners and attorneys), nonprofit and community-based organizations, academics, students, and healthcare systems. Pre-conference workshop attendees were drawn from both attendees of the Climate and Health Equity Summit and locally from the Twin Cities area.

The Network benefited greatly from interactions with GLISA other small grantees, particularly through quarterly grantee calls that focused both on reports from individual projects and on cross-cutting themes, including common challenges and opportunities among the grantees, such as building connections across sectors and increasing ability to identify and implement more equitable and inclusive practices. It was unfortunate that the COVID-19 pandemic precluded meeting fellow grantees in person at the Great Lakes Adaptation Forum.

Use of Climate Information and Services

The Network and its partners benefited from the information about climate science and climate trends in the region that were shared by GLISA staff during the training sessions. In addition, recipients of the Network's email newsletter and online audiences will benefit from climate information from GLISA which will be shared on the same page as the Frequently Asked Questions document.

Network attorneys had previously used, and in fact written about, the major human health impacts of climate change as discussed in the Fourth U.S. National Climate Assessment, and several Network attorneys had worked with various aspects of climate change in a particular state or community, but this was our first time working with trends related to climate change at a regional level.

Frankly, when the Network initially proposed the project, we were somewhat uncertain about how we would use the climate information and services provided by GLISA, and it may be that GLISA was not entirely certain how the project would integrate climate science, public health, and law and policy. But the intersection of the various disciplines evolved more or less organically. The actual use of the climate information and services was essentially along the same lines as what was intended from the initial proposal. Perhaps the greatest difference, with the passage of time due to the pandemic, was increasing sophistication among some public health practitioners, so that the use of the information was not necessarily different in kind, but different in degree. For example, the questions asked during the Q & A period at the pre-conference workshop in October 2022 may have been more in-depth and more nuanced than they would have been in 2020, two years earlier in the overall engagement of the public health field in addressing climate change as a threat to public health.

The Network found that having access to climate information, analysis and expertise deepened and sharpened the legal and policy analyses in the FAQ. Due to the evidence-based and place-based orientation of public health departments, incorporating accurate, regional climate science enhances the utility and credibility of the Network's climate resources.

Outcomes and Outputs

TRAININGS

- Pre-conference workshop at the Climate and Health Equity Summit (in-person, October 2022 in Minneapolis, MN)
- Training and re-launch of the climate committee of the Wisconsin Public Health Association in March 2023. In a sign of the ongoing demands of the COVID-19 pandemic on the public health workforce, the climate committee of WPHA had not met for over one year at this time.
- Collaborative training for the Great Lakes Public Health Coalition, with key leadership provided by Wisconsin Public Health Association and Minnesota Public Health Association (June 2023)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In conjunction with the webinar trainings, the Network also produced a set of Frequently Asked Questions (forthcoming) at the intersection of climate change, public health, and law and policy. The purpose of the FAQs is to pull together information and analysis from the disciplines of climate science, public health, and law, with individual questions focused upon specific topics. Climate information is a critical component of the FAQs because public health is built upon an evidence-based assessment of health hazards and their root causes, and then addressing those health hazards and root causes. The FAQs will be posted on the Network website in August, and will provide an accessible, searchable set of written resources, in addition to the trainings and webinars. The FAQs will be included in the Network Report (the Network's electronic bimonthly newsletter) and posted on the Network's [website](#).

Topics addressed include:

1. Climate trends in the Great Lakes Region
2. Extreme heat
3. Redlining
4. Climate gentrification
5. Extreme precipitation
6. Private wells
7. Harmful algal blooms
8. Great Lakes Compact
9. Solar energy and air pollution
10. Law and policy priorities

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SOCIETAL IMPACT

- Created FAQs at the intersection of climate science, public health, and law and policy.
- Enhanced collaboration among public health associations in the Great Lakes region. While public health associations were already organized in the Great Lakes Public Health Council (GLPHC), and a number of public health associations in the region had adopted statements related to climate change in the years prior to the grant period, the Wisconsin Public Health Association volunteered to take on a lead role in organizing the training for the GLPHC, including through publicizing the training, taking registrations, and providing technical support and facilitation for the webinar. This was especially valuable at a time of

diminished resources and staff capacity after 3 years of pandemic response.

- The trainings helped to shift mindsets and increase confidence and sense of agency. For example, the first training with the WPHA included a discussion of proactive strategies related to extreme heat, and a healthcare provider member discussed the need to institutionalize proactive strategies to shift regular appointments to telehealth during poor air quality days --- providing better protection of patient health, as well as reducing individual car trips, which themselves contribute to poor air quality and overall climate degradation.
- A [blog post](#) describing the Climate and Health Equity Summit featured several innovative resources from public health partners in the Great Lakes region and around the country. Because of its support for the pre-conference workshop, GLISA was featured as a [sponsor](#) of the Summit.
- A new [Midwest Climate Collaborative](#) provided the opportunity for an additional presentation in February 2023 with its inaugural Summit. The Network presented on public health law and policy and community engagement strategies to address the unique challenges to public health posed by climate change in the Midwest. While the primary audience at the Summit was not public health practitioners, it was an opportunity to share public health concerns and solutions with an interdisciplinary climate audience.
- As a result of conversations growing out of both the pre-conference workshop and sessions during the larger Climate and Health Equity Summit, the Network and several local health departments collaborated on an abstract which was accepted for the 2023 National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Annual conference in July to share about strategies to address climate change at the local health department level. The health departments represent regions all across the country, including the Great Lakes. A similar session will be part of a pre-conference workshop at the National Public Health Law conference to be hosted by the Network in October, 2023.
- Testimonial from a sustainability supervisor at a local health department in Ohio, describing the Climate and Health Equity Summit, including the pre-conference workshop,

"I keep telling colleagues that it may be the best conference I have been to. The size and diversity of occupations/professions made it an amazing way to learn and gather information from others experiences and it was so intentional. I left so energized and excited!"

- The Network has had information about the collaboration with GLISA on its website throughout the project, which has resulted in inquiries from time to time. Recently, we were contacted by the new environmental health manager of a medium-sized city in Michigan expressing an interest in learning more about the project. Unfortunately, the contact came after the June 27 GLPHC webinar had taken place, but we have shared the recorded webinar, plan to share the FAQs when finalized, and have reached out to this key constituent to determine whether there is interest in scheduling a meeting for further discussion of how the Network and GLISA can provide him with actionable information and analysis.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Without a doubt, the greatest challenge to the project was unforeseen and unforeseeable – the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic challenged the Network's project in some of the same ways it challenged many other grantees – such as in the halt on travel and in-person meetings and shift to virtual meetings and trainings. And it may have challenged the Network in some ways that were more unique to the project. To a large extent, public health practitioners, their agencies, and their professional associations were almost wholly consumed by COVID-19 response in 2020, and to a lesser extent, into 2021 and 2022. Even staff with no direct responsibilities for infectious disease or emergency response were frequently diverted into an "all hands on deck response to the pandemic," including education, enforcement, mass vaccination clinics, and the like. In addition to the direct effects on the availability of individual staff, the pandemic response (and in all-too-many places, backlash to the response) had far-reaching effects in terms of

funding, human resources, and capacity for continuing climate-related activities and planning.

That said, by the time of the Climate and Health Equity Summit and pre-conference workshop in fall of 2022, many attendees shared how impressed they were by how much progress had been made, and how much climate work had moved forward, even in the midst of pandemic response. In particular, a number of participants from Minneapolis and other parts of the Great Lakes region commented on the change in readiness and openness to move forward on health equity, including climate justice. They attributed the increase in readiness in part to the murder of George Floyd, the uprising that followed, and subsequent dialogue and reckoning with persistent racial inequities, including disparities in COVID morbidity and mortality which are correlated with economic injustice for frontline workers and frontline communities which tend to experience poorer air quality and less tree cover and green space.

Perhaps the lessons learned include the need to prepare for a public health emergency to last longer than it may initially appear that it will last, to anticipate that this may affect the capacity for other public health priorities, and to remain alert, nimble, and flexible in order to act quickly should the public health emergency create opportunities to act.

Another lesson learned is that the flexibility and willingness of GLISA in working with its grantees, including the willingness to grant multiple no-cost extensions were an important factor in preserving and strengthening the Network's relationships with its public health partners. The Network's partners were fully engaged in COVID response, and at the same time, they wanted to honor their commitments with respect to this project. GLISA's flexibility and ability to accommodate the other demands of pandemic response meant that this project was not one more demand placed upon public health practitioners, health departments, and public health associations already being stretched to the limit. While in the short term, this may have been an opportunity cost, in the long term, it builds trust, and means that when we returned to complete the trainings in spring, 2023, the public health partners had more attention and energy to devote to resuming and in some cases, expanding upon, previous climate work.

Next Steps and Future Goals

The project is being completed as this white paper is being written and finalized. The final training has been delivered, and the FAQs are being finalized and prepared for posting on the Network website and dissemination through the Network's email newsletter.

The Network is committed to continuing and expanding this work in the future. As noted above, the Network has upcoming presentations at the NACCHO conference and its own national public health conference in 2023. In fact, the Network is undergoing an internal reorganization, one aspect of which is that a team of attorneys will focus entirely on addressing the public health impacts of climate change, and spreading equitable law and policy strategies to adapt to and mitigate those impacts and the underlying climate change.

The Network anticipates that it will add to the Frequently Asked Questions resource, as well as continue to partner with public health and community-based entities in order to provide trainings and create additional legal resources. Typically, the release of legal resources such as the FAQ generates legal technical assistance requests, which both enable the Network to provide practical assistance to individual public health entities seeking to implement legal solutions, as well as to identify the next set of questions and needed legal resources that arise. While some public health practitioners, health departments, and public health associations are at the forefront of tackling climate change, there is a need for boundary organizations such as the Network and GLISA to work to help spread their innovative strategies, adapt them to the climate and legal conditions in a particular jurisdiction that may be ready to join the next wave of jurisdictions to take action, and support effective communication and implementation strategies tailored to varying natural, cultural, political, and legal environments.

The Network also anticipates undertaking additional legal research and analysis to support interventions identified in the U.S. Policy Brief that accompanied the Lancet Countdown. When the next National Climate Assessment is released, the Network expects that there will be demand for climate information focused on the national, regional, state, and local levels, paired with legal analysis and

resources to support the implementation of new laws and policies.

Our experience with the preconference workshop and FAQs suggests to us the need to create and disseminate a toolkit, and offer a regional or national webinar for public health and community based organizations. The toolkit could include the following components:

- Climate data (broad national trends, with perhaps some regional specifics);
- Human health impacts of climate change;
- Health equity and climate change; and,
- Law and policy approaches to address the human health impacts of climate change.

Finally, the Network seeks to build capacity for projects that will involve policy surveillance and legal epidemiology across all 50 states. Policy surveillance is a rigorous method of researching and analyzing the laws related to a particular topic, such as renewable energy standards or legal protections for outdoor workers. It facilitates the assessment and evaluation of innovative laws, thus enabling one to compare their effectiveness in states which may differ in their approach to key aspects of a relevant legal intervention, and to compare them with health outcomes in states with no relevant law.