

Climate and Health

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We are only as healthy as the world around us—our air, our water, our land and ecosystems. When these things are threatened, so are we. Climate change is a buzzword that floats around our minds, an intangible but terrifying thought. How do we conceptualize it? How do we do something about it? A direct way to meet climate change head on is by understanding its connection to our public health, and how we can prepare and protect the health of our communities and families.

Climate change and public health are inextricably linked. As environmental professionals, we are honored to serve as guest editors for this issue of the Delaware Journal of Public Health on climate change and health. The articles in this issue address how climate change does and will continue to affect the health of Delawareans, how Delaware agencies and organizations have been taking action to combat negative health impacts, and how our neighboring state of Maryland is addressing this topic.

As a result of climate change, Delaware is experiencing hotter temperatures, increases in vectors, degrading air quality, more frequent flooding, and more extreme damage from storms. While it is easy to think about how climate change affects our infrastructure and natural resources, we must not forget climate change's effects on public health. Any climate change effect will have health impacts on individuals directly: a heat wave can cause a spike in heat exhaustion cases; a warmer and wetter climate can increase the risk of mosquito- and tick-borne diseases; degrading air quality can result in more asthma hospital admissions; coastal flooding can affect the mental stress and physical safety of homeowners. The list goes on.

Articles in this issue expand on how three primary climate drivers, heat, air quality and vector-borne illness—have the ability to affect our physical and mental health, in ways universal and specific to Delaware.

Still, it is not enough to understand the negative health impacts of climate change. We must also understand the health benefits of mitigating greenhouse gases and adapting to climate change. There are actions that Delaware agencies and organizations are already taking to address climate change in a way that improves the health of Delawareans. Articles in this issue discuss the expansion of green space in Wilmington, the Plan4Health initiative, the Climate Ready Workforce Pilot Project and the Delaware Environmental Public Health Tracking Network as initiatives working to better the health of Delaware's people and communities.

This issue also explores efforts by Maryland's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Looking beyond our state borders allows us to draw on the experiences and advice of our neighbor states.

Climate change has the ability to affect the health of our family, friends and neighbors, but we have the ability to protect our people, resources, and environment by understanding the science

at play and planning ahead. By understanding how climate change affects health, taking action in Delaware, and drawing from what others have done, we can have a healthy, climate-smart Delaware.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue of the Delaware Journal of Public Health. We encourage you to use the information in this issue, whether that means applying it to your job or engaging in conversations with others on climate change and health.

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