Climate Change and Social Resilience

Findings from Community Listening Sessions

Oregon Health Authority

PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

Contents

Introduction

Oregon's [Climate and Health Resilience Plan](#) identified "strengthening social networks and social cohesion" as a strategy for building community resilience to the adverse effects of climate change. Social connectedness has been identified as a key component to increasing a community's resilience to trauma and disasters that are expected to increase as Oregon's climate warms and weather patterns change. In order to better shape our understanding of social resilience and to inform our program's next steps in this area, we used several strategies in our Climate and Health Resilience Plan:

- Actively engage with our diverse community partners and elevate the voices of our most vulnerable populations to inform policy priorities.

- Engage diverse partners, including indigenous communities, in identifying and generating meaningful qualitative and quantitative data to inform local and culturally appropriate climate action.

- Lead or support story projects that lift the voices of specific populations including climate refugees, tribal elders and migrant farmworkers.

At the heart of this project is an attempt to understand social relationships and climate resilience from the perspective of *vulnerablized* communities. Research shows that social relationships are critical for the health and well-being of individuals and communities, and yet we have no public health or governmental programs that focus on building, supporting or strengthening our social relationships. Our health care and social services, including those for mental and behavioral health, focus on strengthening individual and family social connections. Many local governments play a role, intentional or not, in strengthening or even weakening,

'Vulnerablized' comes from the Spanish word "vulnerabiliza-do," which means to be made vulnerable. This report uses this term because it is a more accurate term to describe the situation in which past and present social and economic systems have made these populations disproportionately vulnerable to climate risks.

the social relationships within communities. As local, regional and state governments take on the important work of increasing our communities' ability to weather and adapt to climate change and other stressors, it is vitally important that we incorporate an understanding of the role that social relationships and connections play in making our communities resilient and protecting all of us.

For this project, we chose the term "social resilience" to highlight the important relationship between social factors and our ability to weather the health impacts and stressors of climate change. Other common terms that are used to communicate similar concepts are social cohesion, social connectedness and social capital.
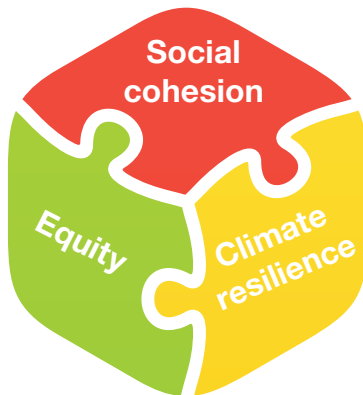
Background

As we consider how to build community resilience in the face of climate change, the importance of social cohesion and social capital has become clear. Studies dating back to the 1970s have shown that social cohesion or social capital are protective against specific disease outcomes.(1) These social factors protect health because they reduce the negative impacts of stress at the individual, family or societal level.(2) More recently, studies have shown that social factors reduce the negative effects of disasters on communities and help them to recover more quickly.(3)

In 2018, OHA's Climate and Health Program worked with OHA's Program Design and Evaluation Services to review research pertaining to social cohesion, social capital and community health and resilience. Themes identified in this review are included in this section and described in the publication Indicators of Social Resilience to Climate Change.(4) The research literature clearly shows that social factors are critical for communities facing large-scale disasters. There is less research on more frequent or chronic losses or hazards, which we anticipate with climate change; however, researchers believe there is the potential for social resilience to play an equally significant role.
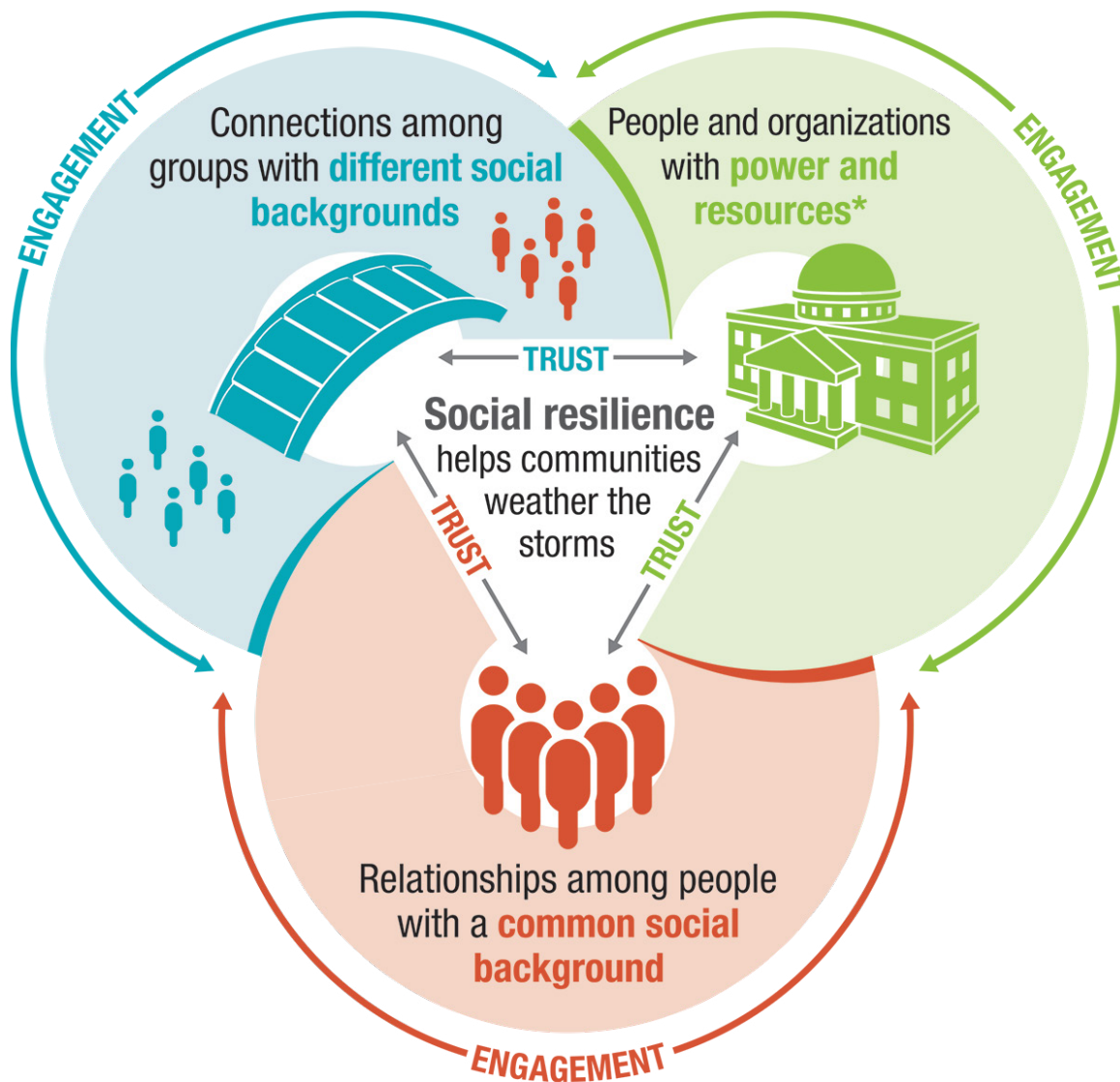
Strong social relationships across ethnic and racial subgroups are important for social resilience.

Some academics have identified a "shadow side" of social cohesion: when a group has high social cohesion within itself but is not inclusive of people or groups in the community that they deem as "other." The potential for the exclusion of other groups at the hands of highly cohesive communities is part of the reason why fundamental values of equity and social inclusion are vital to the development of social/community resilience.(5,6,7) Furthermore, unfair advantage or inequitable treatment across social groups negatively affects trust within the community and undermines resilience; it also affects trust in governmental institutions.(8)

Bonding, bridging and linking is a useful theoretical framework for understanding the importance of equity, social cohesion and climate resilience. Although social capital and social cohesion are terms that are often used to describe similar concepts, the key difference between them is the importance of power. Social capital, in contrast with social cohesion, acknowledges the

importance of power in social relationships. There are different ways researchers have defined social capital. For this project, we have chosen the theoretical framework of "bonding, bridging and linking" because it clearly articulates the different types of social relationships in communities that play a role in making changes to the policies, systems and environments that can make our communities more equitable. In choosing this framework, we acknowledge that climate resilience is not about returning to or maintaining an ideal state; rather, it addresses challenges by strengthening and transforming communities to be more inclusive and equitable.

ENGAGEMENT

Connections among groups with **different social backgrounds**

People and organizations with **power and resources***

ENGAGEMENT

TRUST

Social resilience helps communities weather the storms

TRUST

TRUST

Relationships among people with a **common social background**

ENGAGEMENT

* Due to inequities, people and organizations with power and resources have the greatest responsibility to engage and build trust with communities.

Approach

In 2019, Oregon's Climate and Health Program partnered with the Oregon Community Health Workers Association to host four listening sessions in different parts of the state to hear from different communities on the topics of climate change and social resilience. The purpose of the project was to learn from different perspectives on what social resilience looks like across different communities and cultures in Oregon. The listening sessions are one way to help ensure that the Climate and Health Program is grounded in the concerns and priorities of Oregon's diverse communities.

The listening sessions were facilitated by community health workers (CHWs) who live and work within the respective communities. Collaborating with CHWs helped us to build trust, encourage participation and build capacity in these communities.

Participating communities

- Latino community in the Hood River/The Dalles area
- White community in the Medford area
- Black and African immigrant communities in the Portland area
- Urban Indian community in the Portland area

Guiding questions

- How has climate change affected your community?
- What does community and resilience mean to you?
- How has your community responded during a challenging time?
- What are ways your community stays connected?
- What are some barriers to staying connected?
- What are examples of bridging between your community and other communities?
- What is your community doing to build support or connectedness?

We asked about these different types of relationships (bonding, bridging and linking) to better understand what these relationships look like in these Oregon communities. We also wanted to learn about opportunities for governmental agencies and organizations to strengthen these social relationships in order to build community resilience. Specifically, how do governmental agencies understand and support

relationships within socially similar community groups? How do we understand, support and strengthen relationships across different social and ethnic groups within our communities? And how do we strengthen relationships between elected officials, governmental agencies and other institutions with all community groups?

As we consider how to incorporate practices that strengthen social relationships, it's important to consider that some social groups within communities have stronger relationships and representation in governmental institutions. In most cases, governmental institutions are disproportionately made up of individuals from socially dominant groups. The lack of representation of *vulnerablized* communities at every level of governmental decision-making can have a negative impact on building resilience across our diverse communities. Thus, strengthening social relationships and increasing community resilience requires a range of investments from workforce diversity to translation and interpretation. These investments can help increase the inclusion and power (social capital) of marginalized communities to influence their policies, systems and environments.

Community perspectives on bonding, bridging and linking

When asked about what "community" meant to participants, many defined it as a group of people with similar interests, background or "like-mindedness" (bonding), or a group of people of different backgrounds working together toward a similar goal (bridging). While some defined "community" as living in a shared geographical area, many also acknowledged how the meaning of community has moved away from this intricate connection to place. People who have similar identities, experiences and shared histories or ancestors may be part of a "community" that is dispersed throughout the country or even the world, connected through the Internet. Many pointed out that we are all part of many communities. We asked many questions using the term "community" in these groups, and people answered in a way that conveyed that "community" includes individuals, families, houses of worship, schools and community organizations. Occasionally, when people referred to "communities" during the listening sessions, governmental agencies (linking) were included in their conceptualization of the term.

Many quotes, like these below, capture more than one aspect of the meaning of "community."

> **I think of two or more people or groups of people who invest time and resources in each other and who have some sort of connection or build some sort of connection intentionally.**
>
> – Listening session participant from a white community in Medford area

> **I think about my neighbors, people living around me. Sometimes it's people speaking the same language, people who have come together when we have issues or people who work around me.**
>
> – Listening session participant from African immigrant community in Portland area

> **"** When I think about community, it's not only the physical shared grounds. It's where people come together to build culture, share norms, values and best practices for best outcomes. It's not only the physical space, but taking those norms and values and those things that make the community thrive, taking those wherever you go, so you are like the seed of the community. Because of displacement and gentrification, some places where folks call community are destroyed and some folks need to take that with them and carry it forward. **"**
>
> – Listening session participant from Black community in Portland area

Bonding: Relationships among people with a common social background

Bonding refers to relationships among people with a common social background. For immigrants to this country, this may mean that you share the same language or home country or similar cultural background. Participants also talked about the "recovery community" or a group of people who share experiences with autism. Occasionally, participants referred to their neighborhoods as their community. Generally, there was acknowledgment that a person can (and usually is) a part of multiple communities.

Staying connected

We asked about how people in their community stay connected; physical gathering spaces and social media were commonly discussed. In addition, cultural connections came up frequently. The common themes across the listening sessions were the importance of physical gathering places, food and cultural identities, and social media as a tool to connect and inform.

Across the listening sessions, people talked about the importance of religious groups such as churches and food (restaurants, farmer's market, informal gatherings) for staying connected. Community gardening, community organizing, festivals, county fairs and school events were also discussed as activities that bring people together. In terms of keeping in touch with what is going on in the community, people talked about the role that CHWs play as well as social media, newspapers, radios, bulletin boards in places like neighborhood stores, and libraries.

Culturally specific connections

Across the listening sessions, there was reference to culturally or ethnically specific places or ways of staying connected.

For African immigrants, a community gardening project in the Portland area was mentioned as an activity that incorporates important cultural connections with health and social benefits. One person explained that since many immigrants grew their own food before coming to the United States, gardening is a way to connect with each other and with the culture and customs of their country of origin.

For the Spanish-speaking community in Hood River, culturally or ethnically specific restaurants and stores as well as the Mexican Consulate were all mentioned as important physical gathering places for the Spanish-speaking community. A few people mentioned they participate in Facebook groups that draw connections to their place of origin.

For urban Indians, specific places weren't mentioned, but some culturally specific ways that people in their community stay connected are through their elders, ceremonies and talking circles.

In Medford, it is notable that the majority of participants were CHWs and these individuals didn't talk about how they personally stayed connected with people in their community; rather how as CHWs they stayed connected with the communities that they work with. One person, who no longer worked in a service organization, referred to their personal experience and mentioned the farmers' market as a place to connect with others in the community.

Bridging: Relationships across different groups within a community

Bridging relationships describe social connections that link people across a cleavage that typically divides society (such as race, class or religion). Participants in the listening sessions spoke about the value of bridging across differences in racial/ethnic identity. The institutions that were mentioned as bringing people together included schools, houses of worship and organized sports. Festivals and other performing arts events were also mentioned.

Social connections among social groups with differing levels of power protect marginalized communities

The importance of bridging relationships between communities and individuals or organizations with more power and influence came up several times in the listening sessions. In the listening session with members of the urban Indian community in

Portland, Greta Thunberg's advocacy work came up. Listening session participants discussed how she was gifted with a Lakotan name by tribal elders at Standing Rock for her climate activism. Some had mixed feelings about her receiving such a gift; however, it was acknowledged that while she is not a part of the indigenous community, she had the opportunity to make her voice heard about climate change — an opportunity that not all indigenous communities feel they have:

> **So, with that, you know, I had to kind of put into perspective how, you know, even though she's not Lakota, even though she's not from these other tribes. She is out there getting her voice heard. We don't have that opportunity to sit there and speak on a national level.**
>
> – Listening session participant from urban Indian community in Portland

In Hood River, participants recognized that members of the Anglo community there came together in support of the Spanish-speaking community and against racism:

> **Another example is that with the political climate, racism has really shown up and that has brought out a lot of allies, last year a person posted a racist comment after a Latino festival event, and because of this post she was fired — the community came together to not tolerate racism.**
>
> – Listening session participant from Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

Schools, churches, organized sports and the performing arts were recognized as institutions that bring diverse communities together:

> " We just had this Saturday a flag football tournament, where youth from both various communities and ethnicities all came together and, played with, for the police, flag football. It was really nice. "
>
> – Listening session participant from Black and African Immigrant communities in Portland

> " The high school youth made such a beautiful time. It seemed we were watching the beauty and beast movie. The singing was beautiful, it seemed that I was watching the movie. And that brings a lot of community from outside. "
>
> – Listening session participant from Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

Translation and interpretation were acknowledged as important for bridging across differences. Not only does it allow for people who are Spanish-speaking to engage and participate, it facilitates communication between people who speak only Spanish and those who speak only English.

> " And I also think that being present in focus groups such as these that is carried out in Spanish and not in English, translating it and vice versa, that gives a lot of strength and shows that this way the community may be able to unite, or people can be invited to participate. Because many times they don't go because of the language. "
>
> – Listening session participant from Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

Community events, projects and festivals bring groups within a community together. The Pan-African Festival in Portland was an example that came up as an event that brought together people with different backgrounds and identities but with shared African heritage. This included Black Americans whose connection to Africa is different and more distant than recent immigrants from African countries. African churches were mentioned as playing a similar role:

> " People can be at African churches…We speak different languages. And, sometimes we sing in different languages. But, we laugh together. We can. "
>
> – Listening session participant from Black/African immigrant community in Portland

The power of solidarity was discussed at length at the listening session with the urban Indian group. One participant talked about the importance of recognizing similar experiences and struggles, working through biases that communities might hold in relation to other communities and maintaining identity:

> " Indigenous market but not just indigenous. It's like indigenous with people of color. And I want to try to find events like that because I'd like to see more of a dialogue between, especially the black community – and the indigenous community, because we have, I think there's a real need for solidarity there and we have kind of a, we have different struggles but similar struggles –and similar obstacles. And when I see the bridge building happening there with, you know, shared community events like market, I think that's really important because there can still be a lot of anti-indigenousness in the Black community, anti-blackness in the indigenous community. Anything that we could do to eradicate that and kind of synchronize our efforts is really positive.

> And one of the things that they were talking about is finding solidarity – wanting to do that but at the same time they were trying to figure out how do we keep our cultural identity. Because as soon as you get into those larger groups – because there's just more of them and they tend to be more organized. Native rights sometimes can get lost in those larger groups. So there's gotta be a way to make that bridging and not have your identity get lost and become the other person's identity. **"**
>
> – Listening session participant from urban Indian community in Portland

Government leaders have important role in fostering bridging

In Hood River, participants talked about how governmental leaders can set a tone that brings people together or that divides people:

> **"** I think that also the governments have a role, because they are very important in making changes and in uniting people too. The capability to disengage and separate. **"**
>
> – Listening session participant from Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

Linking: Relationships between communities and institutions

Linking refers to relationships that individuals and community-based organizations develop with organizations that have institutional power and resources. Many of the participants in the listening sessions were CHWs and as such work to create connections between the communities they work with and organizations that provide health and social services.

In the Medford listening session, there was a lot of discussion about the services available in Jackson County.

66 I actually really hold community health workers (in high regard) and the people who do that in-between work, people who have come from their community who are turning around and honestly I don't know of a whole lot of community health workers and people who are in this in, in this middle ground here, who haven't come from something themselves. I think we've all come from something. 99

– Listening session participant from the white community in
Medford area

66 I came from homelessness and addiction and struggled my way through and made my way into the professional world and so I think that's really where I see a lot of the resilience is with people coming from the community pushing their way through and being that middle ground and being that connectiveness from the top down to the grass roots and we're really right kind of in between. I almost wish there was a little more like power given to the voice of those folks who are in between. 99

– Listening session participant from the white community in
Medford area

66 And I mean that's everybody…all of us here are doing that heavy load, trying to gain an understanding of how organizations and systems work, but at the same time listening to the needs of the community, and so I see that as one of the ways that we work through the barriers and challenges. It's really hard. When you're in that middle groundwork, it's hard to have pressure from both ends. 99

– Listening session participant from the white community in
Medford area

Climate impacts

Across all listening sessions, participants demonstrated an understanding of the causes of climate change and its global impacts. Participants shared their understanding of localized impacts to their communities here in the United States, and those participants who are immigrants talked also about impacts in their countries of origin.

Cross-cutting impacts

Most participants considered climate change as a serious threat to our world. There was mention of all the major climate impacts in our state: wildfire, drought, snowpack reduction, extreme heat and floods. There was also acknowledgement of populations who are particularly vulnerable — specifically, agricultural workers, people experiencing houselessness, those whose livelihoods are at risk (e.g., people working in the fishing industry) and indigenous communities. Health impacts of climate change were also mentioned including infectious disease, respiratory problems and water insecurity.

People talked about Oregon as a place that is not experiencing climate change impacts that are as severe as other places in the country and world. Listening session participants in the Medford area spoke to more direct and personal experiences of climate-related impacts in their communities. In listening sessions from the Portland metropolitan area, people primarily spoke of these impacts in the abstract.

A few people, who had lived in other parts of the world including Mexico and countries in Africa and in Central America, talked about climate-related impacts they observed in their countries of origin. Some of the impacts that were mentioned included drought, water insecurity, food insecurity and displacement. There was an understanding by many that climate change exacerbates existing social and health problems.

Direct impacts to health and well-being

Across all listening sessions, people talked about the impact of climate change on their sense of hope for the future. Many people talked about feelings of sadness, fear, despair and anxiety in response to hearing about and seeing climate change.

> " I don't regret having kids, but if I would have known the way the world was gonna be turning out, like I don't know if I would have had kids. "
>
> – Listening session participant from urban Indian community in Portland

> **The glaciers in the mountains that guarantee or supply water for the valley for agriculture have already been very low, so it has dropped a lot. That is something to make you cry and worry because the future of this place depends on the water from the mountains.**
>
> – Listening session participant from the Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

> **Will there be a future after we are gone?**
>
> – Listening session participant from the African immigrant and Black community in Portland

Wildfire and respiratory effects

In the Medford listening session, there was a lot of discussion about the previous summer (2017) when there was a series of large wildfires that had a significant impact on the air quality in the area (Southern Oregon). In addition to respiratory effects, people talked about how 'sheltering in place' had impacts on their mental and emotional health and well-being. The climate in Oregon is such that people spend a lot of time indoors throughout most of the year and depend on the summer months to get outside and go on vacation. Having to stay inside throughout the summer to avoid smoke was stressful. People in this listening session said that they experienced in themselves and observed in others anger, frustration and sadness. They noticed that having to stay indoors for extended periods made people they interacted with "short tempered," caused many to have "short fuses,"to be "not talkative" and to have "no smiles." It seemed to exacerbate tensions in households; someone working for a domestic violence organization said they had received an increase in calls about domestic violence while people were advised to shelter.

> **I just remember that feeling of oh my god, blue sky, you know, that I think we take for granted, but also it does kind of affect you, you know, mentally, because you don't get the sunshine. It's like what happened to my summer. I spent it indoors the entire time because it was too smoky to go outside.**
>
> – Listening session participant from the white community in Medford area

Wildfire was also mentioned in the other three listening sessions.

" These are the ones that are developing respiratory diseases, especially when there are fires. This past year there were fires in California, far away, and even here we got smoke. So people who have asthma or have respiratory problems are affected by that. "

– Listening session participant from Latino communities in
Hood River/The Dalles

" Just like we had those forest fires, which was a cause of, I think, climate change. And for our football teams or athletes that participate in the sports outside, they weren't able to participate outside because the quality of air wasn't up to standard… for us to be outside to practice. "

– Listening session participant from Black and African
immigrant communities in Portland

Indirect impacts to health and well-being

In Hood River, the economic impacts of climate change were discussed in more depth than in other listening sessions:

> ❝ …The town of Parkdale is the last one to harvest. So this climate change is causing warm temperatures to start sooner. Then there are times when the fruit is ready for harvest sooner or later than normal. And if it is ready sooner, then people just pick it, which is done by the end of September. But if it takes longer to be ready for harvest, the city of Parkdale or the Parkdale area has lost millions of dollars because they can't harvest it and they start to drop. And when the rain and the cold weather come and people cannot pick it, lot of fruit is thrown away… ❞
>
> – Listening session participant from Latino communities in Hood River/The Dalles

> ❝ The economy is greatly affected when it happens. I say because I have a store and I have seen that when there are changes of that nature, people either don't have enough money or struggle much more to buy what they need. ❞
>
> – Listening session participant from Latino communities in Hood River/The Dalles

The issue of affordable housing and houselessness was discussed as an important and ongoing social issue across the listening sessions. Participants identified projects or services in their communities that provide support to people experiencing houselessness as important strategies to build resilience.

One participant stated that houselessness is not a problem in more impoverished parts of the world, such as in Africa. They alluded to broader "social problems" as causing homelessness rather than caused only by an individual's lack of money or housing.

> " Why do we have homelessness? Maybe because of lack of money, resources, housing… but also because of social problems. In Africa, where we have the poorest of the poor, you didn't see people sleeping in the streets… Are these issues connected to climate change? It's a question I have. Is social change connected to climate change? I don't know. "
>
> – Listening session participant from Black and African immigrant communities in Portland

One person talked specifically about impacts of migration on affordable housing and displacement for the Black community in Portland.

> " For some folks, it's not really that bad. Because when you think of tornados, hurricanes, flooding, scorching heat, we might have some snow one day or two in the wintertime that shuts everything down, but for some folks, this is like a utopia. And so folks moving here forces rent to go up. Then it displaces residents who have been here, who might not be able to contend with that rent or that increase in like livable capital. And so I feel like that definitely has an impact and those changes [affect] me and folks in my community. "
>
> – Listening session participant from Black and African immigrant communities in Portland

Barriers to community resilience

Basics needs are not being met

Food insecurity and houselessness came up in every listening session as important issues in all communities. People talked about these being issues in relation to climate change in several ways. First, that people experiencing food insecurity and houselessness will be more vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. Also, basic needs such as food and housing are considered priorities in terms of building resilience and being prepared for climate change:

> **❝** Someone mentioned to me earlier today that, you can't prepare for climate-related disasters or any natural disasters. You can't stock up water, and food and supplies if you can't keep food in your pantries. So being prepared for climate change or for disasters is really a luxury and a privilege that a lot of people don't have. **❞**
>
> – Listening session participant from urban Indian community in Portland

Barriers to bonding

People also talked a lot about wanting to help people in their communities more, but they run into barriers in doing that. Across several listening sessions, many people mentioned that they felt stretched thin or had too many responsibilities to take additional time to help people in their communities who need it:

> " Because as much as we want to try sometimes to help and be there for the community when they need us, but we also have responsibility with our families or children that we have to take care of, so we cannot really be there; cause [I] have to, like, balance my time between what time do I have for my family and what time do I have to do all this, so that tends to be a challenge for me when I have people I need, know they really need my help, but I also have to balance on when do I have time for my family. "
>
> – Listening session participant from African immigrant community in Portland

In one of the listening sessions, a couple of people talked about differences between living in the United States and living in their home country. Life in the United States does not allow for coming together as it did in their country of origin, which has significant consequences for people's ability to create and maintain social connections:

> " Why I say this is because, in Africa, we have [more] time. If someone needs you and they are your family member, we cook for everyone. But here, because of schedule sometimes we have two jobs and have no way [to help], so what do you do? We call and we have, like, we call each other and say you will do this tomorrow. "
>
> – Listening session participant from the African immigrant community in Portland

In addition to barriers to social connections among individuals, barriers to social cohesiveness among organizations serving the same community also came up. Specifically, a couple of people talked about how siloed funding fosters competitive relationships among organizations, making it challenging for collaboration and cohesiveness:

> " One of the reasons from my perspective why we aren't united is because we work in silos in our own organizations with special objectives, so we tend to work alone for our own success. Our leaders have not gotten together to work together. There has not been a collaboration. "

– Listening session participant from Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

> " …because sometimes we focus so much on meeting deliverables that we leave out very important things in front of us like collaboration, that is one of the thoughts I have had. We have very strong groups here in our community, but they each run their own wheels. "

– Listening session participant from Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

Barriers to bridging

Polarization, discrimination and racism, and divisive leadership were all brought up as barriers to social cohesion across different social groups within communities. Racism was mentioned as bringing divisiveness to community vents, and that people with more financial means sometimes don't have empathy for people who experience hardships that are common in their communities.

1. Polarization, or the division into two sharply contrasting groups (e.g., rich, poor) or sets of opinions or beliefs (e.g., liberal, conservative): Some people felt that there is more polarization now than there has been in the past, and the divisiveness extends to families:

> " Community is the space in which we all live, and there's so many different pieces of that; there are a lot of things that polarize us, whether it is political or people's beliefs or values, and maybe just not opening your eyes and seeing who all lives here. "

– Listening session participant from the white community in the Medford area

> " It separates us. We're so polarized right now. I mean, from the dawn of time humans are opinionated, but I can't think of a time where it's been more pronounced than this. And I think there's been other times where there's been a huge, you know, negative impact because of the political climate, but probably before my time. So, this certainly feels — it sits heavy on a generation for sure, an incoming generation of voters, you know, I can think of many, many families — I can't think of a single family who doesn't have some kind of divisiveness because of this, or just isolation in general. "
>
> — Listening session participant from the white community in the Medford area

2. Interpersonal racism, discrimination and stereotyping were mentioned across listening sessions, but not many shared personal stories or examples with one exception of a community event in Hood River:

> " The 4th of July parades are when people come together, or the cherry blossom festival, more and more Latinos have become involved/participated where they didn't before. Sometimes it is hard because there's still a lot of racism. Last year when the group that was riding horses — someone screamed at them, "Leave back to Mexico," so those kinds of things discourage people. It is an area where we need to create more connections; there are two communities here in the gorge completely separate with very different needs. "
>
> — Listening session participant from the Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

3. Divisive leadership: Community members in Hood River made a connection between divisive leadership and the incident at the Cherry Blossom Festival described above.

Bridging happens more in a crisis but could also work to address ongoing complex social problems

In Medford, participants talked about their observations of bridging across social groups in times of crises:

> " We didn't really have too many dangerous fires in in a lot of the areas, but I know there was an issue on the coast last year and there was a lot of response over there. The community… that's a pretty divided community over there. There's a lot of rich retired and then there's a lot of poor working families, and so that's pretty much just how it is. Everybody really did come together for the most part. I think it's interesting, and we did it here too…people were handing out masks. Stores were selling them cheaper. And so it's interesting…of course you have a right to clean air, but then when we come to the housing issue, there's a lot of arguments about that. "

– Listening session participant from the white community in the Medford area

> " People do jump in with their capes on a lot, which is fine, but we do have a lot of pull back when it comes to the more hard-hitting issues like housing and food and things. The people who are in need are really the ones driving that boat. When it comes to the hard issues… the bigger overreaching issues; of course, your animals should be alive and of course you should have clean air, you know, people do come together pretty quickly for that, and across all the barriers, from the small organizations to, you know, the more, the wealthier loftier sitting situations and whether they see it is a need, based on their experiences. "

– Listening session participant from the white community in the Medford area

Organizations aren't intentionally bringing different communities together

In the Medford listening session, one participant recognized that their organization had not considered the value of bringing diverse populations within their community together. Instead they have focused on the linking relationship between a specific population and their organization:

> " There's really not much going on to bridge the really distinct communities. When you can go down and you can sit with people, who are learning English, and then you're learning Spanish. And they do have those conversation groups. I've been to a couple and they're really interesting. I just pretty much see people just kind of — they stay segregated. Even if they go to the (same) community events. "
>
> – Listening session participant from the white community in Medford area

> " I struggle with this question myself, in that I don't think as a community we do a very good job of bridging the multitude of communities that we have. Because the LatinX community is not connected to the homeless community or to just the general poor, working class poor, English-speaking community, even though they have way more in common than they have different, at least economically speaking. I haven't ever seen it, anybody trying to get people who have a lot in common together to address a larger issue. I feel like we, as a community, do a really good job of keeping everybody separated. "
>
> – Listening session participant from white community in Medford area

Barriers to linking

In terms of the social capital framework, linking reflects relationships between institutions or people in positions of power and groups of people or communities. Systemic oppression and structural racism fall in this category because they reflect how institutions interact with groups of people. Another theme that came up was related to barriers for communities to engage with institutions and organizations on decisions that affect them.

Systemic oppression

In the Medford listening session, participants talked about how communities don't come together to address houselessness and poverty; they are perceived differently than natural disasters because they only affect a portion of the population. One person suggested that houselessness or poverty is attributed to an individual's mental health problems rather than getting to the roots of these broader social problems, which could be a denial that systemic oppression exists.

> " Thinking about natural disasters, we can attribute to the greater environment, but when somebody doesn't have housing or we're struggling with any multiple social challenges…What have they done wrong? I mean because they come from that perspective of "how come I haven't had those experiences?" There's no context. But, overall it's a lot easier to come to a conclusion when we're talking about people who are homeless or in poverty; it's so much easier for us to divert that to a mental health realm and then it kinda gets lost.
>
> It's easy to blame it on people with mental health or substance use or anything. And especially if you don't understand why it started in the first place.
>
> Is that denial about systemic oppression? "
>
> – Exchange between listening session participants from the White community in the Medford area.

In the urban Indian group, an example of systemic oppression included funding structures that reflect the dominant culture and do not consider the cultural disadvantages native communities experience in competing for these financial resources:

> 66 When you're working with non-native organizations and, and governmental agencies, every time they come…there was nobody to really consider Native American children – so, that was getting in the way they were able to advocate for themselves. And same thing with housing. Because a lot of things do not take into consideration the culture, so if you were to go down and look at, like, policies for different grants such as applying for you start looking at you're going how am I gonna get our native community to, to do this? Cause they're not, they're not going to…
>
> Systemic oppression 99
>
> — Exchange between listening session participants from the urban Indian community in Portland

Community or civic engagement

In Hood River, there was a long discussion about barriers to people within the Latino community engaging in programs and civic life. In addition to fear of deportation, people talked about lack of training or education and language as barriers.

1. **Education**

> 66 I'm going to share with you my personal experience, because I am from the community. Six years ago, I did not work in this organization and did not do much work for the community, and do you know why? Because I wasn't trained. 99
>
> — Listening session participant from Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

66 As a single mother of a family who had not finished high school, I was not trained to be able to work or to be able to advocate at the level that I can advocate right now, that is not very high, but I can do much better because I am trained. 99

– Listening session participant from the Latino community in
Hood River/The Dalles

2. **Language**

66 We need a lot of advocacy from leaders that know how to talk and connect, thanks to the Regional Health Equity Coalition that has supported a lot in advocacy efforts; for example the City of The Dalles planned a local academy for government in November 2018. They had everything ready, but they didn't have it in Spanish, until we contacted them to ask for the material in Spanish, and thanks to our RHEC efforts we were able to get interpretation for that — so thanks to that, we are trying to advocate to get money assigned for interpretation for future projects. For example, in the Community Advisory Council we have one person representing Latinos and they count that as a person who represents the entire Latino community, they're not accessible only people getting paid to do that get to participate. 99

– Listening session participant from the Latino community in
Hood River/The Dalles

3. **Fear**

❝ Sometimes it is fear. It is fear, because it is exposing yourself and if you have a family to feed, to care for... It's different from case to case and some have experienced it in their own flesh. They have been deported, or they may have lost someone who was the breadwinner of the family. Then, they lose like, that faith, that desire to participate due to their circumstances. Many people say, "What would I give to be there, but if I don't have papers and something happens even I would leave. So, I respect that because sometimes it's because of fear. ❞

– Listening session participant from the Latino community in
Hood River/The Dalles

Community strengths

Faith, hope and ceremony were mentioned among urban Indian and African immigrant participants in the listening sessions in Portland. Ceremonies, talking circles and "our spirituality" were identified as important community strengths and resources by participants of the urban Indian listening session. On person indicated that "remembering our ancestors' struggles" is an important resource to draw upon when facing challenges.

Participants in the African immigrant community said that "faith," "hope," "patience" and "working together" made their community resilient.

> ❝ All to be able to pick up and go no matter how tough it is. Just being able to have hope… ❞
>
> – Listening session participant from African immigrant community in Portland

Recognizing diversity within communities was mentioned as a strength in the Hood River/The Dalles and urban Indian listening sessions:

> ❝ I think one of our biggest strengths is the diversity in the community all under this big community umbrella that is different communities. ❞
>
> – Listening session participant from urban Indian community in Portland

Natural environment and resources were discussed among community strengths in the Hood River, Medford and urban Indian listening sessions:

> " Well, I also wanted to add that one of the strengths or benefits or blessings of living in this area is the quality of the water we have. I like it a lot and I also like the attractive natural resources we have. For example, here we go to the waterfalls and it is beautiful. There are not many of those things in the world. "
>
> – Listening session participant from Latino community in Hood River/The Dalles

> " In terms of strengths I was just thinking about this area's natural resources and how we have a lot of agricultural projects going on right now, and there's potential for more. "
>
> – Listening session participant from white community in Medford area

> " The community can extend to place, you know, the natural environment. With plants, animals and systems around us. It's like the eco system. It's part of our community. "
>
> – Listening session participant from urban Indian community in Portland

Well-resourced and effective service organizations were mentioned as a strength in Medford:

> " I think that's one of the biggest strengths here…The fact that there are organizations and individuals who kind of are seeing the needs of our community and reacting and creating programs and getting the word out and being visible and meeting people where they're at. That's really huge here. "
>
> – Listening session participant from white community in Medford area

Connections across communities and intergenerationally was noted as a strength by the urban Indian group:

> " And, I think, having different healing opportunities at different times, that way everyone is able to take part in it. In the indigenized spaces that we offer you know, the healing that takes place along with the knowledge that's being passed. You know? for all ages — we've done things for the youth all the way on up to the elders. "
>
> – Listening session participant from urban Indian community in Portland

A resilience building project

Proof of identity for undocumented community members

In Hood River, a diverse coalition of community organizations successfully advocated for establishing identification cards for everyone in the community regardless of immigration status. Municipal IDs can provide the necessary documentation for proof of identity or residency necessary for essential services. This successful initiative involved organizing within the Latino community in Hood River (bonding), with other organizations in the community (bridging), and with governmental officials such as the Sheriff (linking).

Discussion

Climate resilience requires that basic needs are met

When basic needs are not consistently met in a community, it significantly affects a community's resilience. The comment made in one of these listening sessions that people cannot stock up food in preparation for a disaster or emergency if they are not able to put food on the table to meet their everyday needs articulates this problem very clearly. Climate impacts threaten to exacerbate the ability for everyone to have food and shelter, and yet the acknowledgment of this need and the plan for addressing it are rarely included in climate action or adaptation planning. Our understanding of this pattern should bring into sharp focus solutions for food insecurity and houselessness as essential climate resilience actions.

People across different social groups come together for acute shared crises but not ongoing problems

In Medford, participants talked about their observations of bridging across social groups in times of acute crises. There was a lengthy discussion about the way in which everyone comes together to respond to acute disasters that affect everyone, but there is not this same response for ongoing social issues that don't directly affect the lives of individuals who have more power and representation among those who make decisions about resource allocation and policies. When it comes to issues such as affordable housing, participants felt that there is not enough support from those in the community who are not experiencing this challenge compared to the shared experience confronting the threat of wildfire and wildfire smoke.

Cultural identity and spirituality are important components of resilience

Research has found cultural identity and spirituality to be important for individual resilience and mental health in marginalized communities.(9,10,11) In these listening sessions, the themes of cultural identity and spirituality showed up most explicitly in the urban Indian group and to some degree in the Pan-African group. For urban Indians in this project, cultural pride and heritage were mentioned as key elements to youth programs, social services, and for healing. For some participants in the Pan-African group, a community gardening program was important for strengthening their community resilience because it helped them stay connected to their cultural heritage.

Community health workers strengthen social relationships in communities

Research has demonstrated the value of CHWs in improving use of health care services, increases in knowledge and behavior change, and disease risk reduction. One of the main reasons that CHWs can improve health outcomes is that they strengthen social relationships between people in communities and the organizations that serve them. In a paper published in 2020, lay CHWs are called "social capital builders" who can successfully promote bonding, bridging and linking social capital. This article suggests that CHWs comprise a "social capital health intervention." Regardless of the specific health issues they may focus on, CHWs strengthen social relationships and increase social capital.

Inequities cause social division

Inequities affect social relationships and make communities less resilient.(12) They affect trust across groups (bridging) that experience different levels of advantage or treatment; they also affect groups' trust in institutions or linking. In these listening sessions, social divisions were talked about as "a lack of empathy," "keeping others down," "not seeing everyone who lives here." Social tensions have been steadily increasing in the United States and are often talked about in the media as a "culture war." Participants in these listening sessions talked about inequities as being an integral part of these divisions.

Recommendations

Government agencies often see themselves as distinct and separate from "communities"; yet we are a key part of the social networks that play a role in social resilience in our jurisdictions. The United States and state governments have a long history of policies and practices that marginalize and even harm certain social groups, primarily Tribes, Black communities and other communities of color. These historical and ongoing social inequities create fractures across different social groups (bridging) and create mistrust of governmental institutions among disadvantaged social groups (linking). With climate stressors accelerating and the associated inequities becoming more apparent, it is increasingly important for governmental agencies to prioritize these social relationships and address inequities in our work.

The following recommendations are based on the themes identified through these community listening sessions, research literature on social capital, and community health and best practices in equity and community engagement. The recommendations provide guidance on how agencies and organizations can be "social capital builders" and increase resilience to the effects of climate change across our communities.

Make and follow through on commitments to equity.

- Make climate funding and investments more relevant for and accessible to *vulnerablized* communities.

- Resource community groups and members to engage in public processes that influence priorities, regulations and other decision-making.

- Invest in interpretation services at advisory group and community meetings. This makes engagement more accessible to communities who speak other languages and supports bridging relationships between people who don't speak English and those who speak only English.

Prioritize and support interventions, initiatives and projects that strengthen social resilience, even if the primary objective is not directly related to climate change.

- Fund and collaborate with community health workers and community coalitions that bridge across diverse social groups.

- Expand culturally responsive community-based mentoring, especially intergenerational programs and peer-delivered services.(11)

- Enhance community resilience through promotion of community storytelling, art and cultural events for priority populations.(12)

- Provide safe, accessible and high-quality community gathering places, such as parks and community buildings.

- Expand programs that address loneliness and increase social connection in older adults.

Incorporate strategies that build social capital into community engagement planning and implementation.(13)

- Recognize the different social groups in a community and how they may be affected differently by a policy, project or plan.

- Work with trusted community leaders and organizations for each of the social groups to understand strengths, cultural values, how they stay connected, relationship and power dynamics between social groups, and relationship history with governmental agencies.

- Identify places and institutions in the community that have demonstrated the ability to bridge across social groups (e.g., schools, arts and cultural events, and sports organizations).

- Increasing agency in a community helps to build resilience; look for opportunities to share power and give community members influence over process and outcomes.

Invest in the workforce's community engagement and bridging skills. A workforce with the experience and skills to meet communities where they are and convene people from different social groups will increase an organization's ability to strengthen community resilience.

- Build a public agency workforce that better reflects the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of Oregon communities. A workforce that reflects the diversity of the people an institution serves is invaluable; it immeasurably increases an agency's ability to develop trust.

- Intercultural communication and facilitation are specific skill sets that people can learn and develop.

Acknowledgments

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