

>> Climate Change and Social Resilience

Findings from Community Listening Sessions



Summary

Oregon
Health
Authority

PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

Climate Change and Social Resilience

Background

Oregon's [Climate and Health Resilience Plan](#) identified “strengthening social networks and social cohesion” as a strategy for building community resilience. Social connectedness has been identified as a key component to increasing a community’s resilience to trauma and disasters which are expected to increase as Oregon’s climate warms and weather patterns change. For the purpose of this project, we defined ***Social Resilience as the capacity of a community to use its social networks to successfully anticipate and adapt to collective challenges and stressors.***

About this project

In 2019, Oregon’s Climate and Health Program partnered with OHA’s Program Design and Evaluation Services to conduct a literature review of social resilience. (1) One of the findings was that many concepts related to social resilience such as social cohesion, do not consider equity and power. In order to bring in the perspectives of communities impacted by inequities, our program partnered with the Oregon Community Health Workers Association to host four community listening sessions on the topics of climate change and social resilience. The listening sessions were facilitated by community health workers who live and work within the respective communities.

2019 Listening Sessions

- Latino community in the Hood River Area
- White community in Southern Oregon
- African-American and African immigrant communities in the Portland Area
- Urban Indian community in the Portland Area

Bonding, bridging and linking

Bonding, bridging and linking is a useful theoretical framework for understanding the importance of equity, social cohesion and climate resilience. Social capital acknowledges the importance of power in social relationships and how these

relationships can bring about change in policy, systems and environments. 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.



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

Common themes that emerged

Impacts and barriers

- Climate change is creating distress and affecting people's sense of hope for the future
- The impacts of climate change are being felt in communities, particularly related to wildfire smoke
- Climate resilience requires that basic needs, like food and housing, are met
- People feel stretched too thin to provide the social support that is needed in their communities
- People across different social groups come together for acute shared crises but not ongoing problems
- Inequities, racism and political polarization are barriers to social resilience

Strengths and opportunities

- Community Health Workers, schools, churches and organized sports serve to build bridges across different groups within communities
- Communities stay connected and resilient through places of worship, faith or ceremony; growing, purchasing and eating food together; and through online communities.
- Communities see their natural environment as either part of their “community” or as a community strength

Climate impacts

Climate change is causing distress

“ 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

Climate impacts on housing and displacement

“ 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 on me and folks in my community.”

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

Barriers to social resilience

Basic needs aren't being met

“ Someone mentioned to me earlier today that, you can't prepare for, for a climate-related disasters or, or any natural disasters. You can't stock up water, and food and supplies if you can't keep food in your pantries. so, so, being prepared for climate change or for disasters is, is really a luxury and a privilege that a lot of people don't have. ”

– Listening session participant from urban Indian community in Portland

People are stretched too thin to provide social support

“ because as much as we want to try sometimes to help and be there for the community when the 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 you 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

Polarization and isolation

“ We’re so polarized right now. 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 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. 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

Racism

“ 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

Community strengths and opportunities

Community health workers act as bridges

“ I... 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... I almost wish there was a little more like power given to the voice of, of those folks who are in between. ”

– Listening session participant from the white community in Medford area

Diversity is a strength

“ 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

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 following 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.
- Enhance community resilience through promotion of community storytelling, art and cultural events for priority populations.(3)
- 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.(4)

- 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.

Endnotes

1. Braun M. Indicators of social resilience to climate change: an annotated bibliography. Prepared for the Oregon Health Authority's Climate and Health Program, 2018.
2. Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division. Healthier together Oregon, Oregon's statewide health improvement plan 2020-2024. [cited 2020 Nov 30]. Available from: www.healthiertogetheroregon.org.
3. Saul J. Collective trauma, collective healing: promoting community resilience after a disaster. Routledge, New York and London. 2014.
4. Phibbs S, York E, Ponco J, Sifuentes J, Irvin V. Building social resilience through public health practice. August 2019: Portland, OR. [cited 2020 Dec 3]. Available from: <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/CLIMATECHANGE/Documents/2020/FINAL%20Climate%20Change%20and%20Social%20Resilience%20Report.pdf>.

Full report can be found at: <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/CLIMATECHANGE/Documents/2020/FINAL%20Climate%20Change%20and%20Social%20Resilience%20Report.pdf>



PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

Phone: 971-673-0482

Fax: 971-673-0979

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer. Contact the Climate and Health Program at 971-673-0977 or email climate.health@dhsoha.state.or.us. We accept all relay calls or you can dial 711.