

Impact of Extreme Heat on Health Care Facilities



2. Health Equity and Community Engagement



Seeking community input to identify populations most at risk of negative health outcomes during and after extreme heat events helps to ensure that healthcare resilience plans prioritize health equity and community engagement. Healthcare organizations can also work with community planners, transportation authorities, and public utilities to build resilience and redundancy into community infrastructure, so that homes and essential community services, as well as healthcare facilities, are less likely to experience disruptions during heat events. Educating patients and connecting them to funding opportunities that will help to reduce their

exposure to extreme heat in the community can benefit healthcare organization resilience by reducing the risk of a patient surge during or after an extreme heat event. Finally, healthcare organizations are encouraged to synchronize their heat emergency planning protocols with the local office of emergency management to enhance cross-organizational coordination during response operations.

The following sub-elements describe specific ways a healthcare organization can integrate health equity and community engagement into their extreme heat resilience planning.

- 2.1 Community Input:** Frameworks like Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) and vulnerability assessments can help identify those in a healthcare organization's patient population and community who may be at higher risk of negative health outcomes during an extreme heat event. Seeking community input can be helpful for refining and validating the organization's initial assessment, and for clarifying which services are most likely to protect the health of community members who are at highest risk of heat-related illness.
- 2.2 Community Infrastructure:** Electrical infrastructure can be compromised during extreme heat events because both power lines and transformers become less efficient when overheated. Increased community air conditioning demand during heat waves can further stress the system. The combination of less efficient power delivery and excessive demand increases the burden on community utilities and can lead to rolling blackouts and power outages. Healthcare organizations can enhance resilience by supporting community programs that increase redundancy in local utilities, increase adaptive capacity in the home environment, and mitigate extreme heat exposure at the community level.
- 2.3 Community Services:** Partnering with community services to provide community-facing supports that reduce the risk of extreme heat can benefit healthcare organization resilience by reducing the surge in demand for healthcare services during an extreme heat event. During power outages, individuals relying on medical equipment requiring electricity, or who take medications requiring refrigeration, such as insulin, may turn to healthcare facilities for help.
- 2.4 Coordination with Local Office of Emergency Management:** Synchronizing a healthcare organization's heat emergency plan with regional peers, the local office of emergency management, and the local utility can result in a more efficient and effective coordinated response during and after extreme heat events. It can also reveal current gaps and redundancies that could impact the effectiveness of responders during an emergency. Coordination also supports the development of personal relationships across organizations and agencies – an important factor during emergency response.