

Study on climate change shows how cities can prioritize public health

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The record flooding still devastating southeastern Texas and the ominous approach of Hurricane Irma offer a stark reminder in the importance of advance planning for the impacts of climate change.

"The reality of [climate](#) change is ever present and growing," says Sabrina McCormick, PhD, an Associate Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health at Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University. McCormick has led some of the first efforts to systematically assess how prepared cities are for [extreme weather events](#). Her work has highlighted dramatic differences by investigating how six U.S. cities located across the country are preparing for climate change.

McCormick conducted 65 interviews with people working in six cities: Boston, Los Angeles, Portland, Raleigh, Tampa and Tucson. [Her previous research with the same group](#) showed that [city](#) planners had yet to fully assess their vulnerability to climate change, leaving serious risks unaddressed.

Her most recent analysis, conducted with Mark Shimamoto, MPH, a recent alumnus of Milken Institute School of Public Health's Environmental Science Health and Policy program, recommends steps that cities should take to protect the [public health](#).

"The benefits of involving [health](#) experts in urban planning efforts can have truly profound consequences," McCormick says. "For example,

demonstrating the effects that an extreme weather event can have on the local grid and other infrastructure can demonstrate what needs to be done to prevent unnecessary deaths as [climate change](#)-related extremes continue."

Her research calls on the public health community to provide information on local climate impacts and vulnerable infrastructure and populations to interested stakeholders in urban areas. The research also highlights the value of "co-benefits" approaches, such as increasing the amount of green space, which can simultaneously decrease climate-related vulnerabilities and reduce greenhouse gases.

["The Role of Health in Urban Climate Adaptation: An Analysis of Six U.S. Cities"](#) was published online recently and will appear in the October print edition of the journal *Weather, Climate, and Society*.

Provided by George Washington University

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