

# US needs nearly \$200 million more on climate-related health research

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A recent commentary suggests that the U.S. should spend roughly \$197 million more than it currently does to research the impact of climate change on public health.

The analysis found that the U.S. spends about \$3 million in federal funds on research related to the health impacts of [climate change](#), says Marie S. O'Neill, one of the commentary co-authors. This isn't nearly enough to adequately address the [public health](#) issues related to global warming, the group concluded.

The commentary's lead author was Kristie Ebi, a University of Michigan-trained epidemiologist and expert on climate change and public health, who is an adjunct professor of Environmental Health Sciences. The article was inspired by another study, mandated by Congress, that assesses the importance of global climate change on health, also led by Ebi. During their research and in preparing testimony for Congressional hearings on the topic, the team realized that the U.S. is woefully underfunding climate change health-related research.

Climate change is expected to exacerbate a number of current public health problems in the United States and elsewhere, including heat-related deaths, diarrheal diseases, and diseases associated with exposure to allergens and ozone. In addition, our aging population is more vulnerable to thermal extremes, as are certain demographic and geographic areas, the commentary said.

"Even disease distributions are likely to change," said Mark Wilson, another coauthor and professor of epidemiology. "Certain areas of the world could become more favorable for transmission of various [infectious diseases](#) that are associated with water, insect vectors, or non-human animal reservoirs. The challenge is to identify the critical research questions that will help inform improvements to the public health infrastructure and prepare for changing environments."

The type of research necessary to solve some of the health problems arising as the planet warms involves working with affected communities and developing concrete solutions, which include addresses the root causes of climate change by reducing fossil fuel combustion, among other measures, O'Neill says.

"Climate change is happening. It's a current problem and we need to address it as a public health priority," she said. However, most research described in official estimates of U.S. spending on climate and health is focused on more specific diseases; for instance sun damage and skin cancer, and doesn't address larger issues posed by climate change.

In the United States, one can look to the Hurricane Katrina disaster to see the broad health implications of the type of extreme weather that is becoming more frequent with climate change. The health consequences of flooding, including mold and fungal contamination, and the mental health consequences to displaced people are just two, the authors said.

The commentary authors concluded that federal agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, must establish large intra and extramural programs with funding of more than \$200 million annually to adequately address the problem. The authors recommended that a standing committee within the National Academies of Sciences oversee the programs and prioritize spending.

More information: The commentary, "U.S. Funding is Insufficient to Address the Human health Impacts of and Public Health Responses to Climate Variability and Change," appears online in *Environmental Health Perspectives*.

Source: University of Michigan ([news](#) : [web](#))

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