



ALASKA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Committed To Advancing Alaska's Public Health Since 1978

ALPHA RESOLUTION 5-2007

Support for Establishing a Public Health Climate Change Program

Sponsors: Alaska Center for the Environment (ACE)
Randy Virgin, ACE Executive Director
Karol Fink, ACE Board of Directors

WHEREAS, there is widespread scientific consensus that the world's climate is changing and the effects of climate change will vary across geographic regions and populations. The Arctic has been particularly and uniquely affected by climate change. Alaska has warmed 3.4 degrees F. in the last 50 years¹ as compared to the global average of a little more than 1 degree F; and

WHEREAS, Arctic climate change has public health implications and Alaska will be the first to experience and address many of the climate related public health impacts as climate related changes are more pronounced and severe in arctic regions; and

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that although the scientific understanding of the effects of climate change is still emerging, there is a pressing need to prepare for potential health risks. This public health preparedness approach is applied to other threats in the absence of complete data, such as terrorism and pandemic influenza. A wide variety of organizations (federal, state, local, multilateral, private and nongovernmental) are working to address the implications of global climate change. Despite this breadth of activity, the public health effects of climate change remain largely unaddressed²; and

WHEREAS, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, the world's most comprehensive report prepared by more than 300 leading Arctic researchers and indigenous experts, details public health effects of warming. Climate change has the potential to impact health in many ways. While some of these are unpredictable, others are supported by considerable evidence³; and

WHEREAS, given that changes in animal and plant distribution and accessibility are predicted to affect food security, alterations to food consumption patterns have the

¹ <http://climate.gi.alaska.edu/ClimTrends/Change/TempChange.html>

² <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/climatechange/>

³ <http://www.acia.uaf.edu/pages/scientific.html>, specifically Chapter 15: Human Health



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potential for significant impacts on health because shifts from a traditional diet to a more “western” diet are known to be associated with increased risk of chronic diseases⁴; and

WHEREAS, warming may increase the potential for bacterial and viral proliferation and vectorborne disease outbreaks⁵; and

WHEREAS, unpredictable ice and weather conditions may increase the number of accidents associate with traveling in these conditions and threaten winter subsistence activities⁶; and

WHEREAS, as permafrost melts, shorelines erode, and waterways change, Alaska may experience a change in the rates of illnesses resulting from the collapse of sanitation infrastructure and changes in access to quality drinking water⁷; and

WHEREAS, changes in the environment and lifestyles may lead to increased mental and social stress in Alaska’s rural areas.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Health Association advocate for the establishment of a State of Alaska, Division of Public Health program to address the public health impacts of climate change.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Health Association will advocate for a public health climate change program that will engage multiple parties in a comprehensive, statewide approach to preventing and preparing for the health impacts of climate change in a pro-active manner and inspire public health professionals to be the catalyst for change at all levels and in all sectors of the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Health Association will advocate for a program that builds on existing programs and utilizes the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s identified priority health actions for climate change⁸ as listed below:

- Serve as a credible source of information on the health consequences of climate change for the State of Alaska.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/climatechange/>



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- Increase epidemiology and surveillance of the public health impacts of climate change by tracking data on environmental conditions, disease risks, and disease occurrence related to climate change.
- Enhance the science base to better understand the relationship between climate change and health outcomes.
- Identify locations and population groups at greatest risk for specific health threats.
- Communicate the health-related aspects of climate change, including risks and ways to reduce them, to the public, decision makers, and healthcare providers.
- Develop partnerships with other government agencies, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, universities, and international organizations to more effectively address Arctic health aspects of climate change.
- Provide leadership to state and local governments, community leaders, healthcare professionals, nongovernmental organizations, the faith-based communities, the private sector and the public, domestically and internationally, regarding health protection from climate change effects.
- Develop and implement preparedness and response plans for health threats such as severe weather events and infectious diseases.
- Provide technical advice and support to the Division of Public Health, the private sector, and others in implementing national and global preparedness measures related to the health effects of climate change.
- Promote workforce development by helping to ensure the training of a new generation of competent, experienced public health staff to respond to the health threats posed by climate change.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution shall be the position of the Alaska Public Health Association until it is withdrawn or modified by a subsequent resolution.

Adopted by vote of the ALPHA general membership on the 3rd day of December, 2007.

Fiscal & Public Health Statement: This action will result in minor costs associated with sending this resolution and accompanying cover letter to the Governor and key political leaders. This action will benefit public health by helping to prepare for the potential public health effects of climate change.