
CAPITAL INVESTMENT STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH, ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE, AND PROMOTING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

As the State of California considers potential capital investment strategies to address climate change and promote community resilience, it is essential that the needs of the public health sector are elevated and integrated into the investment portfolio. Climate change is a public health emergency that will require a robust set of investments to ensure we have the resources needed for both prevention and response, especially for the communities most vulnerable to climate impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed both critical gaps in our public health infrastructure and the stark underlying health inequities that place low income communities of color at greater risk from both pandemics and climate change. Climate change threatens the health and well-being of California residents in numerous ways. This is particularly true for communities that experience health inequities, the systemic disparities in health outcomes that exist by race, income, neighborhood, language, immigration status, and other factors. Investments that promote resilience through health, equity, and sustainability will best position California communities for the full range of challenges likely to manifest in the coming years.

To fulfill this critical and time-sensitive need, the Public Health Alliance of Southern California (Alliance) and the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII) offer the following strategies for capital investments that can address climate change and promote community resilience while also improving public health. These recommendations are aligned with the [U.S. Climate Call to Action](#), which has been endorsed by more than 150 public health and health care agencies and organizations across the United States, including the Alliance and BARHII.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

We offer the following overarching recommendations for how capital investments that address climate change and promote community resilience should be allocated:

Prioritize Equity by Requiring Investments in Disadvantaged Communities: All capital investments should set aside a certain percentage of funding for disadvantaged communities (DACs), including for job creation and economic stability in the aftermath of COVID-19. The definition of “disadvantaged community” should offer a menu of options, similar to the [Active Transportation Program](#) and [Sustainable Transportation Planning Grants](#) programs. These programs both recommend use of the Alliance’s [California Healthy Places Index](#) (HPI) to identify DACs and we recommend this be one of the options for additional resource allocations, as HPI elevates community conditions, including climate vulnerability, and is associated with life expectancy at birth.

Dedicate a Minimum Percentage of Funding to Address Public Health: In addition, we strongly recommend that a certain percentage of capital investments be dedicated to investments that address public health. Climate change is a public health emergency, and many of the most critical strategies to addressing it and promoting community resilience will involve the public health sector.

Promote Partnerships Between Government Agencies and Community Partners: Capital investments should include funding explicitly for partnership between community-based organizations, environmental justice and local health departments to ensure holistic climate, health, and equity assessment and planning activities.

CAPITAL INVESTMENTS TO ADDRESS PUBLIC HEALTH

To address public health specifically through capital investments, we offer the following strategies:

INVEST IN PUBLIC HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE

- Invest in mobile public health and health care units with pre-placed supplies and equipment that can be utilized as alternative care sites to enable provision of health care following addressing climate-related extreme events such as wildfires, floods, power shut-offs, and extreme heat events
- Provide funding for the development, renovation and expansion of public health labs and community health facilities to be able to respond to health needs during climate emergencies
- Invest in statewide Health Information Technology that would both unify and coordinate data infrastructure systems across the state
 - » A more unified and coordinated system would allow for expanded surveillance of climate, health, and equity impacts, including syndromic surveillance, emerging vector-borne disease, etc.
 - » During the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of such a system has revealed major issues in obtaining and responding to real-time data
- Assess required investment in health care facility and hospital infrastructure to ensure capacity to continue providing services during climate-related events (e.g. electric supply)

INVEST IN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE CENTERS

- Invest in the development of Community Resilience Centers to provide community access to resources and services during climate emergencies, such as wildfires and extreme heat events
 - » “Community Resilience Centers” would be defined to include community facilities such as libraries, school auditoriums, senior centers, day care centers, etc.
 - » Ensure all Community Resilience Centers have proper ventilation, heating, cooling, sanitation, refrigeration, first aid, electricity and internet for community members and other essential systems in place
 - » Include public health and equity considerations in the development and retrofitting of all Community Resiliency Centers, including considerations for elderly people, disabled people, children, people with chronic diseases or compromised immune systems, unhoused communities, LGBTQ folks
 - » All retrofitting and new development of Community Resilience Centers should include, to the greatest extent possible, green/renewable building principles (e.g. cool roofs, solar/renewable energy sourcing, green water management, energy efficiency etc.), as well as accessibility considerations (e.g. transit access)
 - » Include funding for mobile cooling units, air filtration units, and back-up energy systems (e.g. solar and/or with battery storage/microgrids) in order to support cooling shelters and clean-air shelters in the event of extreme heat events and/or wildfires
 - » Create microgrid systems among Community Resilience Centers
 - » In alignment with Community Resilience Centers, invest in community resilience to wildfires, extreme heat, and other impacts more broadly, including;
 - ◇ Implement cooling, air quality, and energy resilience systems (e.g. microgrids) in all California schools
 - ◇ Increase resources available for home hardening, including single-family homes, multi-unit dwellings, and public housing, assisted living facilities, and senior centers
 - ◇ Invest in clean-up, transportation, and disposal infrastructure for toxic debris following wildfires, floods, etc.

ADDITIONAL HEALTH-PROMOTING INVESTMENTS

Community resilience is of critical importance in weathering and thriving in the face of climate change. Investments that promote health, equity, and sustainability are the key ingredients to community resilience, and should be emphasized in any investment strategy. Investments in each area below should include a requirement for a certain percentage of investments go to DACs, and consideration for anti-displacement measures.

AGRICULTURE

- Purchase land for urban farming
- Invest in suburban agriculture

TRANSPORTATION

- Invest in active transportation infrastructure, including capital investments in sidewalks, bicycle facilities, trails and other capital investments that promote safe walking and bicycling
- Invest in public transportation infrastructure, including capital fleet investments, bus shelters, and facility improvements that enhance and promote the use of public transportation

BUILDING AND HOUSING

- Invest in affordable housing creation and preservation.
- Provide funding for retrofits of existing public facilities and residential housing
- Invest in retrofitting schools, community centers, other gathering places in vulnerable communities to increase community access to safe, climate resilient spaces

WATER

- Provide funding for safe and affordable drinking water infrastructure
- Invest in clean wells and infrastructure systems to ensure adequate water is accessible in emergencies
- Ensure in modernization of water systems

PARKS AND GREENSPACE

- Provide funding to increase the tree canopy in areas that lack adequate shade, especially DACs
- Invest in parks, stormwater and urban greening projects
- Invest in public green space/parks/urban greening, cool roofs, cool pavements

For more information, please contact:

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