



Climate Change and Health Policy Action Passes the 2015 Hawaii Legislative Session

Over the past 2 years, the Hawaii Public Health Association (HPHA) has been involved in efforts to increase the public policy discussion regarding the complex issues of climate change and health. HPHA had not previously taken a stand on this issue, but ultimately determined that leadership and strong support on a public health issue that is unparalleled in nature like climate change and its impacts on health was needed. HPHA's mission is to promote public health in Hawaii through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy, and to advocate for a strong public health workforce able to effectively respond to health challenges. An HPHA member survey conducted in August of 2014 indicated that our members are very concerned about the current and projected impacts of climate change on Hawaii's people and their health.

Following an HPHA-organized briefing on climate change and health held at the State Capitol on October 23, 2014, the decision was made to work with key state legislators to introduce a climate change and health bill (HB 591 and SB 882). During initial hearings on the bill, resistance emerged that focused on HB 591 proposing to amend the Hawaii Climate Adaptation Initiative Act 83, Session Laws of Hawaii, 2014. The stated purpose of Act 83 was to address the effects of climate change to protect the State's economy, health, environment, and way of life. Act 83 established an interagency climate adaptation committee within the State Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). It was noted that, among the various potential impacts of climate change, the proposed Act 83 climate change committee would first focus on and develop sea level rise vulnerability and adaptation reports and was not amenable to revisiting this intent.

Once the departmental objections were known, the next steps to engage support were developed, and HCR 108/SCR 164 was proposed in lieu of HB 591 and SB 882, with the resolution title: "HOUSE/SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE CONVENING OF A CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH WORKING GROUP TO ASSESS THE SCOPE AND RISKS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE HEALTH OF HAWAII'S RESIDENTS AND TO DEVELOP A STRATEGIC PLAN TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS TO HEALTH STATEWIDE".

HPHA was present to act as a lead testifier at every House and Senate hearing held on the bills and resolutions on climate change and health, stating that more work is needed to address the growing threat of climate change on health and that climate change influences human health and disease in numerous ways. HPHA cited the work done by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Public Health Association (APHA) and other sources on the links between climate change and health. Most state legislators were very responsive to the issue, and readily supported the ultimate adoption and concurrence of House and Senate on HCR 108, with little debate occurring on its merits.

HCR 108, SD1 has the support of the Hawaii State Department of Health as the lead agency as well, and HPHA anticipates that the Hawaii Working Group on Climate Change and Health will be co-convened sometime this summer. HPHA has committed its full support to DOH in carrying out this unfunded legislative mandate, and we see this resolution as an opportunity for the Department of Health to appoint working group members such as HPHA, that have the interest and capacity/background in health needed to adequately address climate change and health factors.

HPHA is also advocating for Hawaii State to apply for the next upcoming CDC's Building Resilience against Climate Effects (BRACE) Framework Initiative. It will assist Hawaii, as it is doing with 16 states and cities currently, to develop and implement models to predict health impacts, to monitor health effects, and to identify the area's most vulnerable to these effects (<http://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/>). HPHA looks forward to working with the Hawaii Department of Health in successfully implementing the resolution to establish the Hawaii Working Group on Climate Change and Health.

On behalf of HPHA, we would like to thank all of you in Hawaii who supported this effort and those individuals and organizations now stepping forward so that we can begin to collaboratively chart our future actions to address the public health implications of climate change and health. We look forward to working with the Department of Health and all other agencies and organizations concerned to address the impacts of climate change on Hawaii's health.

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