

# California Department of Public Health Supports Tribes to Reduce the Health Impacts of Climate Change

In the past decade, California experienced more frequent and intense heat, wildfires, droughts, and reduced air quality, outpacing historic records. These are the latest threats for American Indian & Alaska Native (AI/AN) Tribes who have survived centuries of dispossession, pushed off ancestral homelands by white settlers or the federal government onto lands deemed less valuable. Today, these lands -- which are more arid, have poorer soil, and less mineral resources -- are more vulnerable to climate impacts such as drought. According to CDC's Climate and Health Program, AI/AN populations are among the most at-risk from climate change: Native Californians face health impacts including injury, loss of life, and displacement due to wildfires; exposure to heavy wildfire smoke exacerbating respiratory and cardiovascular disease; and heat-related illness. Climate change also stresses resources important to cultural practices, food security, and healing traditions, threatening the availability of animals and plants used as traditional foods and medicines. AI/AN Tribes and Tribe-serving organizations recognize the need to prevent and reduce the health impacts of climate change, e.g., by utilizing ancient natural resource management practices such as cultural burning, which Native practitioners were banned from using for decades, and which today is recognized as a best practice to reduce forest fuels that make wildfires more intense and dangerous. Today, Tribes often lack access to the data, resources, capacity, or powers of self-governance necessary to confront the growing vulnerabilities of their lands and peoples as the climate changes.

In 2021, the Climate Change and Health Equity Section (CCHES) hired a Tribal Climate Change Program and Policy Specialist ("Tribal Program Specialist") to liaise and coordinate with Tribes and Tribal-serving organizations to build capacity to address the health and equity impacts of climate change. Accomplishments of the Tribal Program Specialist include providing technical assistance at an existing monthly Tribal climate and health collaborative; building connections with five (5) Tribes across California representing northern, central, and southern California; learning more about Tribes' needs and goals related to climate and health equity; and bridging across State government to develop relationships with Tribal liaisons in other agencies.

The Tribal Program Specialist worked with the Redwood Valley Rancheria, Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe, Tule River Rancheria, Pala Band of Mission Indians, and the Miwok Tribe of the El Dorado Rancheria on integrating health equity considerations into climate change and environmental programs, plans, and communications; and with State agency partners including the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, the Strategic Growth Council, the California Energy Commission, and others to support Tribes facing health equity impacts from climate change. To bring together partners from across the

state around climate-health issues facing Tribes, CCHES hosted a meeting of the Public Health Workgroup of the California Climate Action Team with the theme “Tribal Health and Climate Planning,” which was attended by more than 80 stakeholders including multiple Tribes. To connect Tribes directly with various California State agencies to hear about opportunities to receive funding and technical assistance with climate change and health-related planning, CCHES hosted a virtual Tribal Climate and Health Funding Fair. Finally, many smaller Tribes lacking federal recognition may be interested in working on climate change but have limited resources for getting started. To that end, the Tribal Program Specialist worked with the Miwok Tribe of the El Dorado Rancheria, a small California Tribe, to collaboratively develop a survey assessing Tribal members’ experiences, concerns, and priorities related to climate change and health, in order to inform the Tribe’s decision-making.

Tribal partners have expressed appreciation for these new connections to resources and planning support to keep their communities healthy in the face of the accelerating climate crisis.

*Federal Fiscal Year 2022 Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant Success Story by the Advancing Climate Change & Health Programs at LHDs, tribes & within CDPH Program*