

MAKING THE CONNECTION:

Climate Change & Older Adults



Climate change threatens human health, including mental health, and access to clean air, safe drinking water, nutritious food, shelter, and safety. Everyone is affected by climate change at some point in their lives but some people are more affected than others because of certain factors like, where they live; their age health, income, and occupation; and how they go about their day-to-day lives. This fact sheet explores how climate change can affect older adults.

Older adults are vulnerable to climate change-related health impacts for a number of reasons. One reason is that normal changes in the body associated with aging, such as muscle and bone loss, can limit mobility. Older adults are also more likely to have a chronic health condition, such as diabetes, that requires medications for treatment. Some older adults, especially those with disabilities, may also need assistance with daily activities. In 2010, nearly half of people over age 65 were reported to have a disability, compared to about 15% of people aged 21-64.

As the nation's population aged 65 and over is set to nearly double by the year 2050 – from approximately 48 million to 88 million – the number of people living with the vulnerabilities mentioned above will grow. Climate change affects the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink, our mobility, our economy, and our ability to recreate. It is therefore, imperative that older adults and their families consider how the condition of their health and home affects their exposure to the negative impacts of climate change.

CLIMATE CHANGE IN ANN ARBOR



Rising Temperatures:

Average air temperature in A2 has increased by nearly 1°F since the 1900s and is expected to rise 3°F to 7°F by 2050.



Hot Days:

Ann Arbor is likely to experience 12 to 36 more days per year over 90°F by mid-century and 30 to 42 more days per year over 90°F by end of-century.



More Precipitation:

Total annual precipitation has increased by over 44% since the 1950s and will likely continue to increase in the future, though types of precipitation will vary (i.e., more winter precipitation in the form of rain or ice).



More Extreme Precipitation:

The total volume of rain falling during extreme events has increased by 37% since 1981 and the number of heavy rainfall events has increased by over 41% since the 1950s. These trends are both projected to continue increasing.

FAST FACTS

- The number of individuals aged 65 and over in southeastern Michigan is projected to increase by over 463,000 between now and 2045.
- Michigan's median income is \$40,765 for a household owned by someone 65 or older.
- 82% of seniors live in an owner-occupied home; 41% of these seniors live by themselves.
- 54% of seniors who rent, pay 30% or more of their income towards housing.
- According to World Health Organization, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year by 2050 – 38,000 due to heat exposure in the elderly.

Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Persons who face intersecting inequalities due to discrimination based on gender, gender identity, disability, race, ethnicity, economic status, age, among others, are among those populations least likely to be able to withstand the inevitable effects of climate change. Addressing inequality and climate change must go hand in hand.

CLIMATE IMPACTS & OLDER ADULTS

Extreme Heat: Climate change will increase extreme heat and lead to higher temperatures throughout the year. Extreme heat exposure can increase the risk of illness and death among older adults, especially people with congestive heart failure, diabetes, mental health issues, and other chronic health conditions that increase sensitivity to heat. Higher temperatures have also been linked to increased hospital admissions for older people with heart and lung conditions. Older heart and lung conditions. Older adults with limited incomes may not have access to air conditioning or may not use air conditioners during heat waves, due to high operating costs.

Extreme Events: Climate change affects the frequency and intensity of some extreme weather events, such as flooding, droughts, and wildfire. If an extreme event requires evacuation, older adults have high risk of both physical and mental health impacts. Some of the most vulnerable are people with disabilities, with chronic medical conditions, or living in nursing homes or assisted-living facilities. Health impacts could be made worse by interruptions in medical care and challenges associated with transporting patients with their necessary medication, medical records, and any equipment. Extreme events can also cause power outages that can affect electrically-powered medical equipment and elevators, leaving some people without treatment or the ability to evacuate.

Poor air quality: Climate change worsens air quality because warming temperatures make it easier for ground-level ozone to form and can lengthen the season of allergens like ragweed pollen. Changing weather patterns and more intense and frequent wildfires also raise the amount of pollution, dust, and smoke in the air. These changes will increase the number of emergency department visits and hospital admissions, even for healthy older adults. Poor air quality worsens respiratory conditions common in older adults such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD). Air pollution can also increase the risk of heart attacks in older adults, especially those who are diabetic or obese.

Illnesses spread by ticks or mosquitoes: Climate change and increased temperatures are leading to ticks and mosquitoes expanding their ranges and being present for longer seasons. This means an increased risk of being bitten by disease-carrying ticks and mosquitoes. Lyme disease, which is spread by ticks, is frequently reported in older adults and presents a greater health risk among older adults with already weakened immune systems.



LOCAL RESOURCES

Help prepare yourself, your family, and your neighbors for climate change by taking the following steps:



*Create a disaster response plan that includes steps for storing medications, meeting transportation needs, and stay safe during a disaster.



* Check in on your elderly neighbors before, during, and after extreme weather events.



* Reduce your energy bill and contribution to climate change by implementing energy saving strategies. Learn more and gain energy saving tips from the Ann Arbor Energy Office (a2energy.org) and Save On Energy (saveonenergy.com/energy-saving-tips/energy-saving-tips-for-senior-citizens/), and learn more about aging in place efficiently programs being promoted by the City of Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations. (www.a2gov.org/sustainability).



*During heat waves, stay cool, drink plenty of fluids, and ensure you have adequate ventilation.



* Apply for a Sustaining Ann Arbor Together neighborhood grant to enhance local sustainability and foster greater resilience amongst aging populations in your neighborhood. Learn more at a2gov.org/sa2t.



*Learn more about organizations serving seniors in our community (<http://blueprintforaging.org/washtenaw-county-senior-resource/>).