

Advancing Health and Health Equity Through Climate Action

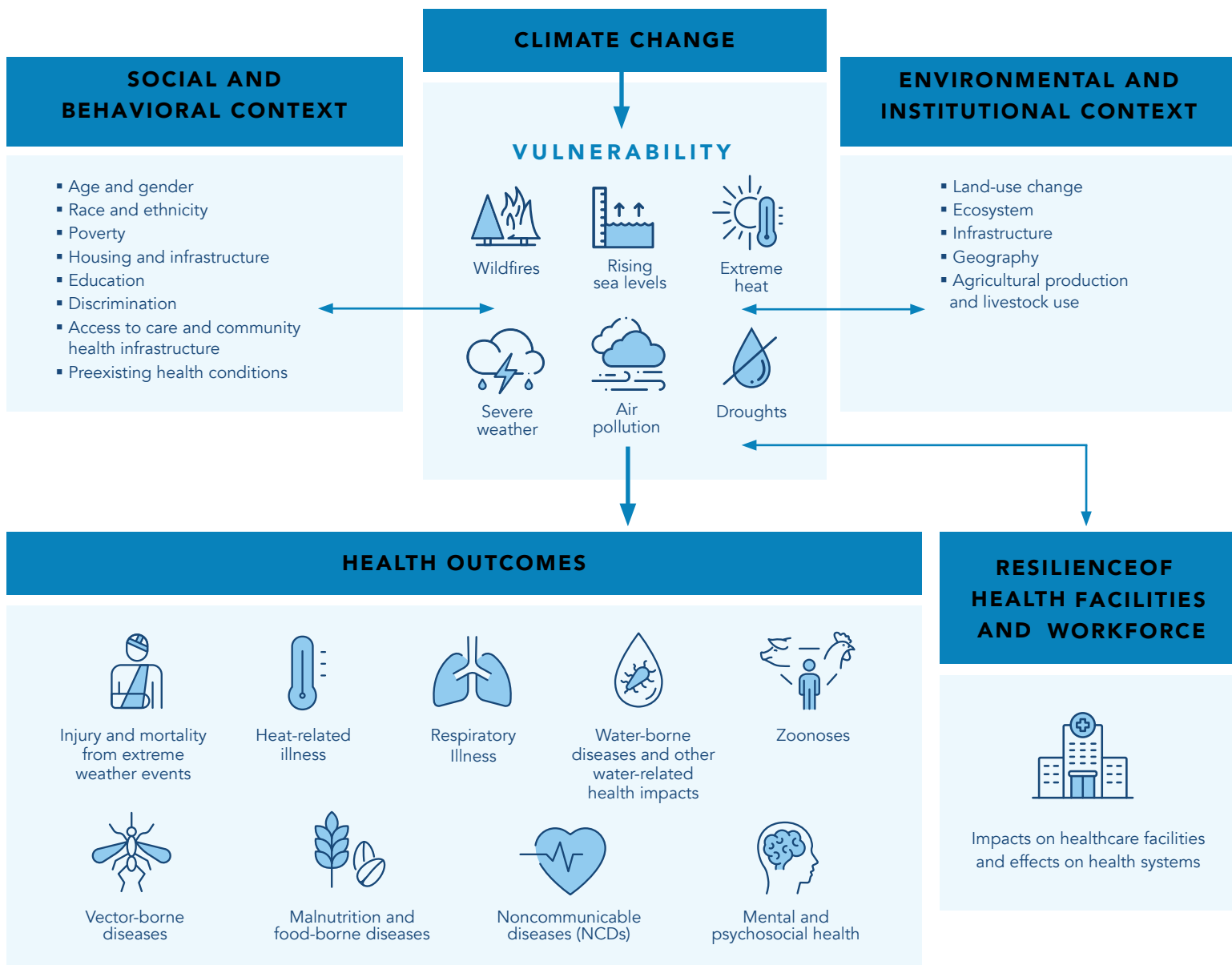
The Private Sector's Role



How Does Climate Change Impact Health?

Climate change is already impacting health in a variety of ways, including by leading to death and illness from increasingly frequent extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, storms and floods. In addition, climate change is undermining many of the social determinants for good health, such as livelihoods, equality and access to health care and social support structures.¹

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has concluded that to avoid catastrophic health impacts, the world must limit temperature rise to 1.5°C. Global heating of even 1.5°C is considered unsafe. However, every additional tenth of a degree of warming will take a serious toll on people's lives and health.



¹ World Health Organization. "Climate Change and Health." World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>. Advancing Health and Health Equity Through Climate Action.

Whose Health is Most Affected by Climate Change?

Climate-sensitive health risks are disproportionately felt by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including women, children, ethnic minorities, poor communities, migrants or displaced persons, older populations and those with underlying health conditions.

Fundamentals of Health Equity and Climate Change²

The root causes and upstream drivers of climate change and health inequities are often the same.

Our energy, transportation, land use, housing, planning, food and agriculture, and socioeconomic systems are at once key contributors to climate pollution and key shapers of community living conditions. The powerful institutions largely responsible for constructing these systems influence and are influenced by social inequities such as class and race.

The health risks and impacts of climate change are not equally or fairly distributed across people, communities or nations.

The impacts of climate change on health are significantly moderated by individual and community vulnerability and resilience. Two critical components of climate vulnerability are pre-existing health status and living conditions. In the United States, these factors are shaped by economics and the distribution of money, power, social policies and politics at the global, national, state and local levels.

They differ by place, race, and income, as a result of inequities in the distribution of money and power, historical disinvestment in some communities, discriminatory practices and policies over time, structural racism, higher pollution burdens, and lesser access to resources for health.

Climate change exacerbates existing health and social inequities.

Climate change worsens environmental conditions (e.g., ozone pollution) associated with chronic illness and injury and causes social and economic dislocations that most impact disadvantaged communities.

Building political and economic power and voice are essential components of climate resilience.

Especially for historically disenfranchised low-income communities and communities of color, power imbalances have allowed the perpetuation of unhealthy living conditions associated with health inequities and climate vulnerability. The lack of power and voice constrains the ability of communities to respond to climate change impacts and contribute local knowledge to climate solutions.

Additional Resources on Climate and Health

[The 2021 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: code red for a healthy future](#)

World Economic Forum Reports

- [Time to Act: Investing in Addressing Social Determinants to Improve Health](#)
- [Investing in Health Equity: Why Strong ESG Strategies Help Build a Healthier, More Inclusive World BSR Climate+Health Nexus Report](#)
- [BSR Climate+Health Nexus Report](#)

How Does This Affect Businesses?

Climate change comes with significant social and financial costs.

The International Labor Organization [predicts](#) that if the world warms to 1.5°C, 2.2% of work hours will be lost in 2030 - the equivalent of 80 million full-time jobs and global economic losses of \$2,400 billion.

- WHO [estimates](#) the health costs associated with climate change will reach \$2-4 billion by 2030
- Climate change can [disrupt](#) global supply chains and interrupt labor productivity

Addressing health inequities can help businesses accomplish their goals of improving workforce productivity, increasing market opportunities, fueling economic growth and improving competitive advantage. The private sector has a unique opportunity to leverage its political, financial, social, and human capital to support upstream solutions for protecting vulnerable communities.



Business has an ongoing, crucial role to play in tackling climate change and health resiliency. It is both a moral imperative, aligned with the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and an opportunity for business as climate change continues to increase health costs and business risks around the globe.

With the coronavirus pandemic and climate change impacts, society has painfully learned that the cost of inaction far outweighs the costs of bold and rapid response and prevention.

— [United Nations Global Compact](#)

² Excerpt from Rudolph, L., Harrison, C., Buckley, L. & North, S. (2018). [Climate Change, Health, and Equity: A Guide for Local Health Departments](#). Oakland, CA and Washington, D.C.: Public Health Institute and American Public Health Association. [Advancing Health and Health Equity Through Climate Action](#)