

# Health and Climate Change

PREPARED TO CARE



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

As the climate continues to change, risks to human health continue to grow. Shifts in the quality of our air and water and in the patterns of seasons and regional trends affect human health, causing injury, illness and death. Transmission of infectious diseases through food, water and disease-carrying vectors such as mosquitoes and ticks can intensify.<sup>1</sup>

Both immediately and gradually, climate change and the increasing frequency and intensity of disaster events affect mental health and well-being. Disasters have a high potential for immediate and severe psychological trauma from personal injury, injury or death of a loved one, damage to or loss of personal property and pets, and disruption or loss of livelihood. Suicide rates are higher among those who have experienced severe disasters.<sup>2</sup> Stress can be accompanied by feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, grief and despair. A number of populations are especially vulnerable to the mental health effects of climate change, including: people living in risk-prone areas, indigenous communities, some communities of color,

*Mindful of the health and wellbeing of creation in a time of disasters intensified by climate change, this ELCA Advocacy resource series invites reflection on being #PreparedToCare.*

*Do you have a personal experience or impression that connects?*

*What are strengths of your congregation in this area?*

*How might you make a difference in your community?*



*Be part of the ELCA Advocacy network. Sign up for news and Action Alerts at impactful moments from [elca.org/advocacy/signup](http://elca.org/advocacy/signup).*

and older adults, women, and children.<sup>2</sup>

## Faith reflections

When new needs emerge, some people who have not previously asked for help will find that they have depleted their physical, financial, emotional and spiritual resources and need support to help them recover. In this situation, the response of local churches becomes increasingly important according to the experience of Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR). Lutherans recognize the advantages of good health and a strong health-care system, and we are committed to raising awareness about

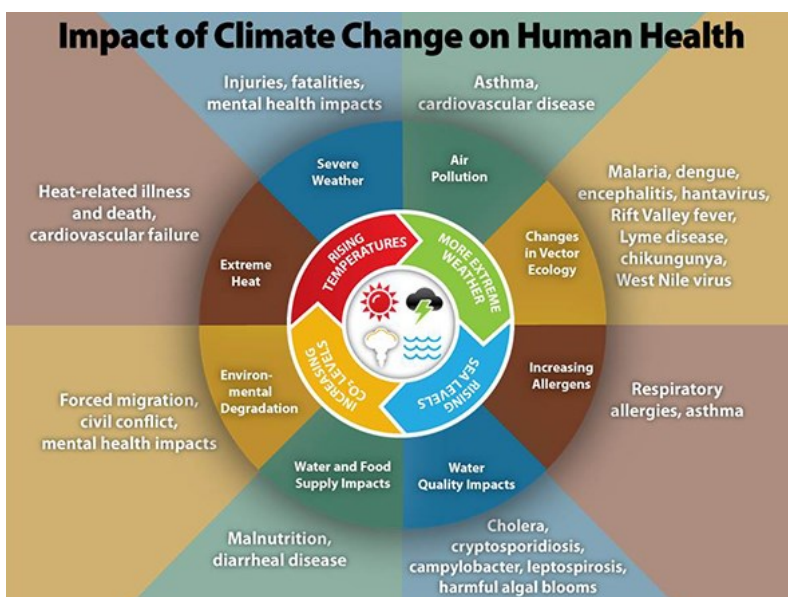


Image from [cdc.gov/climateandhealth/](http://cdc.gov/climateandhealth/)

“Loving God,  
come near to us and to all the earth.  
Give hope and encouragement to those living  
with illness and anxiety,  
strength to those who work for healing,  
resolve to those who advocate for solutions,  
tenderness to caregivers and medical  
professionals,  
comfort to those who mourn on this day,  
and your bold spirit of welcome to your  
church.  
God of mercy, hear our prayer.”

Prayer from ELCA Worship Resources  
for World AIDS Day [adapted]

health-related issues and ministries, both in the United States and around the world.

As the church, we are called to be with people in their suffering and confusion, to comfort and encourage them. We need not have all the answers, but we must accompany people as they try to make sense of what is going on.

## Vital support

Numerous resources available from academia and the federal government address health concerns associated with climate change and the aftermath of increasingly frequent disasters. Here is a sampling. The federal government resources require funding through the congressional appropriations process.

- From the American Psychiatric Association, multiple resources related to **coping with disaster and trauma**. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/coping-after-disaster-trauma>
- From the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (part of the federal Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences), resources linking military and disaster psychiatry, and integrating **disaster mental health and public health**. <https://www.cstsonline.org/about-us/mission>
- From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), "**Preparedness and Safety** Messaging for Hurricanes, Flooding, and Similar Disasters." [https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readiness/00\\_docs/CDC\\_Hurricanes\\_PreparednessSafetyMessaging\\_July2018\\_508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readiness/00_docs/CDC_Hurricanes_PreparednessSafetyMessaging_July2018_508.pdf)
- From the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc., resources for **first responders** and others physically and/or emotionally affected by critical incidents. <https://icisf.org/about-us/>
- From the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (created by Congress as part of the Children's Health Act), resources for **children and families**. <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters>
- From the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (part of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services), **behavioral health resources** to help prepare, respond and recover from a disaster. <https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness>
- From the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, "Addressing **Heat Waves** in the Workplace" and many other guides. <https://www.preventionweb.net/knowledgebase/collections>
- From the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, information about the Emergency **Prescription Assistance** Program. <https://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/planning/epap/Pages/default.aspx>
- From the **Veterans** Health Administration, Office of Emergency Management (a program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs), resources from the Multiple Comprehensive Emergency Management Program. <https://www.va.gov/vhaemergencymanagement/>

“Health is central to our well-being, vital to relationships, and helps us live out our vocations in family, work, and community. Caring for one’s own health is a matter of human necessity and good stewardship. Caring for the health of others expresses both love for our neighbor and responsibility for a just society.”

ELCA Social Statement: “Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor,” 2003

1 “2018 National Climate Assessment Report,” from [nca2018.globalchange.gov](https://nca2018.globalchange.gov)

2 “Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance,” from [climateforhealth.org](https://climateforhealth.org), and “Congregational Disaster Preparedness Guide, Part Two: Response,” from [ELCA.org/Resources/Lutheran-Disaster-Response](https://elca.org/Resources/Lutheran-Disaster-Response)