TuSalud

How Climate Change Drives Health Inequities

Latino communities face greater hardships from climate change because of ongoing socioeconomic disparities.

October 22, 2021 By Jeanette L. Pinnace

A recent summary of a report issued by the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) reiterates that climate change will persist into the near future and will have an enduring effect on both the environment and human beings. However, certain population groups, such as Latinos and other people of color, immigrants and poor people are more likely to experience negative health outcomes and serious economic hardships from climate change as a result of continued racial and health inequality in the United States, reports SaludAmerica.org.

Defined as a long-term shift in global or regional climate patterns, climate change gives rise to a series of scary events that harm human health. Unlike weather, which is temporary, changing daily and annually, climate change is a progressive problem that occurs over a longer period of time.

The consequences of climate change stem from increases in global temperatures, which are causing sea levels to rise and storms to strengthen, leading to floods and drought that will endanger the health of people at risk, including Latinos. Health hazards include extreme heat, contaminated food or water, poor air quality and an uptick in infectious diseases caused by the movement of insects from one geographic area to another.

In addition, climate change can exacerbate and overwhelm the already precarious socioeconomic situation in communities where people face health inequities due to discrimination and limited access to health insurance, nutritious food and good-paying jobs.

“The effects of climate change add to other longstanding differences among people that result in different health outcomes for communities in the United States,” observed HHS experts. “While the impacts of climate change will be felt by all Americans, they will be deeper and longer-lasting among the poor, people of color and other populations.”

Earlier this year, an unprecedented winter storm in Texas ravaged mostly poor Latino and Black communities and left many families huddled in freezing homes without power and short on food during what USA Today called “one of the worst weather events” to hit the state.

Extreme storms will occur more often and “cause injuries, deaths and illnesses” as well as “harm mental health due to damage to property, loss of loved ones, displacement and chronic stress,” warned HHS.

In response to these predictions, Salud America! advised Latinos to learn more about how climate change drives health inequalities. The organization also champions grassroots support as a way for Latino communities to push for the enactment of policies that address climate change.

To learn more about climate change and health, read “Latinos Face Major Health Risks From Global Climate Change.”

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