Impacts of Climate Change on Health Care

Executive Summary

The five warmest years on record to date occurred from 2014 to 2018. As global warming intensifies, health, social, and financial effects will continue to compound—a exacerbating a population health crisis at a global scale.

Nationally, the healthcare industry is beginning to utilize carbon reduction systems for the benefit of their bottom line. Taking systemic steps to reduce emissions and become more energy efficient reduces emissions that contribute to climate change, lowers energy costs (ostensibly enabling providers to reallocate funding to instead meet increasing systemic demands), and contributes to healthier environmental conditions in the community. A key benefit of utilizing carbon reduction strategies is to reduce the cost of care while increasing responsiveness.

In Oregon, the direct and indirect public health costs associated with air pollution are estimated by the Environmental Protection Agency to be $3.5 billion per year; negative impacts lead to cardiovascular, respiratory, and nervous system issues, a lack of worker productivity, cancer, and premature deaths. An untapped opportunity has presented itself to work across sectors to create a healthier, economically viable, and a more sustainable future for all Oregonians.

Through emissions mitigation and resilience efforts, health systems and facilities can contribute to a healthier society, while reducing long-term operational costs. Through climate change-related health training, health care providers can work to identify and treat a population that is becoming more susceptible to climate-related health risks. Climate change threatens to disrupt the basic tenets of health: clean air and water, and a healthy food supply. Health systems have a responsibility to adapt to the Earth’s changing climate by minimizing greenhouse gas emissions through carbon offsets, creating environmental efficiency in supply chain markets through local vendors, and adapting medical models to address and anticipate changing health needs of the communities being served.

2. Confronting climate change: Northwest Permanente in the environment of the future
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