

# ASTHO Community Action Plan Templates for Children's Environmental Health

## A Primer for Use by State and Territorial Health Agencies

### What is Environmental Health?

Environmental health is a discipline within public health that focuses on the relationship between people and their environment. Some of the issues that span environmental health include the built and natural environment, food and water sources, air quality, chemical contaminants, and vectors. Practitioners in this field seek to understand and address the cumulative health effects and exposure burden of harmful chemicals in different environmental media (e.g., air, water, soil, food). Through environmental health policy efforts, jurisdictions can establish protections to reduce toxic exposures to individuals and communities, including vulnerable populations (e.g., children, pregnant women, aging population), historically marginalized communities, and communities with environmental justice concerns.

Federal, state, and local environmental health [programs](#) protect communities from natural, man-made, unintentional, and deliberate environmental threats and hazards. When implementing public health programs and services, it is important to consider environmental factors, underlying disease, disability, and other unique vulnerabilities. This responsibility is shared across all levels of government and often requires cross-collaboration between partners in different sectors, such as environment, agriculture, natural resources, transportation, planning, housing, non-profit, and the private sector.

There are also other potential benefits of addressing environmental health concerns that may result in policies that are more protective of public health, promote smart growth and development, and strengthen food and water safety practices. By improving our understanding of potential environmental impacts and opportunities for policy and/or program interventions, public health staff can help to identify the opportunities for greatest environmental risk reduction for human health, particularly in children at all life stages.

### Children's Environmental Health

Compared to the general population, children are more vulnerable to environmental health hazards due to the early stage of their physical and cognitive development. This makes children more susceptible to negative health effects associated with harmful exposures like poor air quality, lack of access to safe food and water, chemical hazards, extreme heat, vector-borne diseases, and other climate-related impacts. Children may also have higher relative exposures to environmental contaminants because they eat, drink, and breathe proportionately more than adults. They also exhibit certain behaviors (e.g., crawling, putting fingers in their mouth) that also increase risk of exposure to certain contaminants.

EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection [strives](#) to protect children and adolescents under the age of 21 from environmental exposures by consistently and explicitly considering early life exposures and lifelong health in all human health decisions. Acknowledging the impacts of a changing climate on human and environmental health, EPA and partners are working to implement policies and programs to better understand environmental risks and safeguard children's health. In particular, EPA is [committed](#) to strengthening protections for children at all life stages, enhancing and expanding partnerships, and addressing children's environmental health disparities. State, territorial, local, tribal, and other federal partners may also invest in different kinds of activities and programs to support children's health, according to the needs of their populations and available resources. [EPA](#), along with other federal and non-governmental partners, can help state and territorial health agencies (S/THAs) promote children's environmental health through technical assistance, as well as grants and other funding opportunities.

Through working with federal and local partners to enact policies and implement programs to address environmental health hazards, state and territorial health agencies (S/THAs) can help to improve children's environmental health in all life stages. S/THAs can support children's environmental health by targeting interventions aimed at improving air quality and other environmental exposures in and around schools and early childhood education centers; improving access to safe and clean recreational facilities and surrounding areas; addressing lead hazards in homes, schools, and other public buildings; and considering children's unique needs in all-hazards and resiliency planning. Prioritizing these interventions in communities with environmental justice concerns and historically marginalized populations can also help to aid children who are disproportionately impacted by environmental health hazards.

## **Role for S/THAs in Environmental Health**

S/THAs provide essential leadership and stewardship to protect the public's health. This includes important coordination, planning, and funding for environmental public health services, and in some jurisdictions, health agencies deliver these services directly to communities. Addressing environmental hazards requires a broad and fully integrated approach that ranges from enforcing regulation to increasing public awareness. S/THAs can work cooperatively with other agencies to protect the public against environmental hazards. Tool such as geographic information systems may be helpful for mapping air and water quality, access to healthy food, tree canopy, location of services, heat maps, and other environmental and economic indicators. Conducting risk assessments can also help to prioritize protections for high-risk populations.

## **Templates Overview**

### **Introduction**

ASTHO, through support from EPA, has developed a set of four Community Action Plan Templates (CAPT) for use by S/THAs. The topic areas include air quality/asthma; climate;

environmental justice (EJ); and lead poisoning. These templates are intended to be adapted and customized by jurisdictions according to their specific needs and goals for children's environmental health. Jurisdictions can prioritize the most pressing actions based on the areas of highest importance, needs, strategic plans, and timelines. The needs assessments should also consider children's unique susceptibility to exposures and vulnerability to health outcomes given their activity patterns and ongoing physical and cognitive development. This prioritization can be aided with the use of GIS mapping and risk assessment tools and processes (e.g., EPA's [EnviroAtlas](#) or [EJ Screen](#)).

The templates provide a roadmap for creating community change by specifying what will be done, who will do it, and how it will be done. Some of the activities target children's environmental health specifically, while others address broader environmental health hazards that impact children indirectly. These distinctions are made in the templates. S/THAs can utilize the templates when helping community partners develop new (or refine existing) action plans.

### **Structure**

The templates each have an introduction section that includes a background on the topical area, goals for the plan, and suggested partners. There is also a background section under each subtopic that explains the linkages between the activities and children's environmental health, including children's vulnerability to the targeted health impacts. Within the tables of the template are a series of suggested objectives, strategies, and activities that jurisdictions may consider as they develop their own action plans. Additionally, each activity has space to write in an evaluation metric and a time frame associated with that activity. These metrics can be helpful to measure progress and determine the level of success or efficacy of a given activity. Some suggested metrics and time frames are included in the templates, but some are also left intentionally blank so the end user can fully customize the metrics. Jurisdictions are encouraged to develop their own metrics in accordance with their desired measures and their corresponding time frames. Metrics should also be SMARTIE (Strategic, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable). When developing metrics, consider short term (1-12 months) and longer term (1-5 years) timelines, but prioritize those that can be achieved in the short term first to get the planning off the ground and running. Time frames should include days, months, and years (e.g., over the next year, from [start date] to [end date], such as July 31, 2028 – July 31, 2029). An example final metric should look like "By July 31, 2030, work with local jurisdictions to increase review of complete streets options and plans by two jurisdictions".

### **Implementation**

The templates are intended to help jurisdictions navigate the community action planning process by providing a set of sample strategic objectives, actions, and evaluation metrics to plan program activities to address key children's environmental health issues in communities. These templates have been designed for S/THAs to support their strategic planning processes and for integrating children's environmental health considerations into state health improvement plans. S/THAs can also share these templates widely within their jurisdictions and with communities directly by providing consultation on activities and metrics related to

children's health and broader public health. S/THAs can also use these templates when engaging with local health departments or other local community partners to help develop a strategic plan for addressing children's environmental health threats. For example, if a county health department is concerned about childhood lead poisoning, the S/THA can use the *Lead Poisoning Prevention* template to create a customized action plan for the county. During this process, the S/THA can collaborate with the county health department to identify which strategic objectives and actions from the template are most relevant for the jurisdiction and then work to integrate these actions and evaluation metrics into a new action plan focused on lead. Considerations for cumulative impacts or implementing actions in historically marginalized communities should be accounted for here.

Depending on the jurisdiction, some S/THAs may play the role of a consultant or technical assistance provider, while others may be more involved in the development of community action plans. Since most states already have state health improvement plans or other strategic plans, S/THAs can lift activities and metrics from those larger plans to integrate into these community action plan templates. Conversely, pieces of these templates may also help inform future state health improvement planning efforts. The key piece of the templates is that they are editable and can be used to help communities identify a set of strategies and metrics that can be tailored to support local efforts for protecting children's environmental health. A blank template is provided below for reference and future adaptation.

# Blank Template

## Objective 1:

*Activities with Direct Benefits to Children*

### Strategy A

#### Activity 1

Activity:

Evaluation Metric:

Evaluation Time Frame: From [start date] to [end date].

#### Activity 2

Activity:

Evaluation Metric:

Evaluation Time Frame: From [start date] to [end date].

### Strategy B

#### Activity 1

Activity:

Evaluation Metric:

Evaluation Time Frame:

#### Activity 2

Activity:

Evaluation Metric:

Evaluation Time Frame:

*Activities with Indirect Benefits to Children*

**Activity 1**

Activity:

Evaluation Metric:

Evaluation Time Frame: