

Addressing the Human Health Impacts of Climate Change: The Role of Individual Attitudes, Perceptions, and Beliefs in Agency Action

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Despite the scientific consensus that global climate change is currently underway, public health agencies in the United States fail to exemplify the practice of preparedness in anticipation of the negative impacts a changing climate will have on human health. It is critical to identify why public health agencies are not taking action so as to identify what can be done to ensure that public health agencies engage the public appropriately about the most relevant health risks. Research has shown that individuals are often driven to make decisions based on their own values and personal beliefs rather than on scientific evidence. Such patterns in decision-making might explain why critical mitigation and adaptation measures are not in place to address the predicted health impacts of climate change. To that end, we surveyed Nursing Directors around the United States to determine how their individual attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge about climate change and the related health impacts might help explain agency responses, or failures to respond, to such health risks. It was expected that female Nursing Directors with a positive environmental attitude and a liberal political ideology would have more positive attitudes toward taking action and higher perceptions of risk as it relates to climate change and human health. The results of this study are intended to better inform future risk communication efforts directed towards decision makers in local public health agencies. The goal would be to identify how to educate and motivate key decision makers to increase the adoption of actions that are critical for the most effective public health response. Programs that provide measures such as disease prevention and emergency preparedness services would ensure that the public health sector is prepared for the widely spread health impacts of climate change.