

Balbus briefs Congress on climate change and public health

By Ernie Hood

NIEHS Senior Advisor for Public Health John Balbus, M.D., participated in a briefing session Sept. 12 for Congressional staff, organized by Rep. Lois Capps, D-Calif. His talk, "Public Health in a Changing Climate: How Does Climate Change Impact Public Health Today, and What Can Be Done to Address It?" provided an overview of the links between climate change impacts and public health.

Capps provided opening remarks and an update on the status of the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act (H.R. 2023), a bill she introduced early in 2013. There were several other speakers at the briefing whose talks touched on critical aspects of the bill.

In his presentation, Balbus summarized key health messages from the current draft of the National Climate Assessment, and noted the health sector components of the president's Climate Action Plan.

"Current research findings show that climate change affects health in many different ways, some of which, like changes in pollen seasons, are having an impact now," he told the panel. "Research also shows that reducing the use of fossil fuels lessens harmful exposures to air pollution and provides immediate benefits to our health."

Balbus, who is the NIEHS lead for climate change and global health initiatives, was joined by speakers from other organizations, including the American Lung Association, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, and the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Environmental Health.

(Ernie Hood is a contract writer for the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison.)



"Climate change is not just an environmental issue," Balbus emphasized to the congressional staffers. "It is clearly a public health issue." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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