

## **NIEHS supports White House event on climate change and health**

By Kelly Lenox

The White House held a live webcast April 7 in Washington, D.C., to highlight data and innovation related to health and climate change. The event was part of a [broader White House effort](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/07/fact-sheet-administration-announces-actions-protect-communities-impacts-) (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/07/fact-sheet-administration-announces-actions-protect-communities-impacts->) to raise awareness of the health implications of climate change, in recognition of National Public Health Week.

NIEHS Senior Advisor for Public Health John Balbus, M.D., was on hand to demonstrate new online resources and to chair a panel on climate change and infectious diseases. “Today is a great step forward, as we release these resources to support learning about and responding to the health effects of climate change,” Balbus said.

According to the National Climate Assessment [Section on Human Health](http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/report/sectors/human-health) (<http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/report/sectors/human-health>), which NIEHS helped develop, climate change threatens health through impacts such as decreased air quality, greater exposure to allergens, and increased illnesses transmitted by disease carriers, such as mosquitoes and ticks. In addition, hospitals and other health care facilities may be threatened by extreme weather events.

### **New online tools**

NIEHS played a substantial role in several of the initiatives announced during National Public Health Week. During the webcast, Balbus demonstrated the [Building Health Care Sector Resilience](http://toolkit.climate.gov/topics/human-health/building-climate-resilience-health-sector) (<http://toolkit.climate.gov/topics/human-health/building-climate-resilience-health-sector>) toolkit. He led its creation, with the goal of helping the health care sector better respond to extreme weather events and other impacts of climate change.

This resource is part of the larger [U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit](http://toolkit.climate.gov/) (<http://toolkit.climate.gov/>) website, which provides public health officials, city planners, researchers, and others with information and decision-making tools. Balbus and Kimberly Thigpen Tart, J.D., NIEHS program analyst, led the team that developed the health topic section of the site.

### **Free public data sets**

The webcast included the unveiling of the health topic on [Climate.Data.Gov](https://www.data.gov/climate/) (<https://www.data.gov/climate/>), which provides free access to more than 150 data sets to help communities, public health providers, and businesses make science-based decisions to lessen the effects of climate-related health impacts.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) took the lead in assembling the data sets. NIEHS provided consultation through the participation of Balbus, Thigpen Tart, and Caroline Dilworth, Ph.D., who is the NIEHS program officer for research grants related to climate change and health, in the [Interagency Crosscutting Group on Climate Change and Human Health](http://www.globalchange.gov/about/iwgs#CCHHG) (<http://www.globalchange.gov/about/iwgs#CCHHG>).

### **Innovation and empowerment**

Representatives from the [White House Office of Science and Technology Policy](https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ostp) (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ostp>) and leaders from academia, government, and the private sector gathered for the event in the Indian Treaty Room of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Many speakers highlighted the innovations that are expected to result from supporting people and communities in activities that promote climate resilience.

“We should work together to empower [people] with tools and opportunities to bring [to bear] the rich contextual information that they have ... as we try to understand the impact of climate change on their individual lives, their neighborhoods, their communities, and our nation,” said [Ernesto Ramirez](http://quantifiedself.com/author/er/) (<http://quantifiedself.com/author/er/>), program director at Quantified Self Labs and one of the panelists at the event.

### **Beyond the data**

On the same day, the White House released the draft [Climate and Health Assessment](http://www.globalchange.gov/health-assessment) (<http://www.globalchange.gov/health-assessment>) for peer review by the National Academies and for public comment. Public health officials and policy makers are especially encouraged to submit comments. Balbus and Thigpen Tart served as co-authors and members of the steering committee.

“This is an unprecedented level of substantive activity on the health implications of climate change,” said Balbus. “It represents the culmination of years of effort and a huge team that has developed across HHS [the Department of Health and Human Services] and the federal government to support this work.”



*Balbus emphasized the new data sets and toolkits are just the beginning, and that organizers are seeking additional data sets. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*Thigpen Tart serves as the NIEHS contact for the National Climate Assessment, which was released in May 2014 (see [story](#)). (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

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