

## CHE Research Summary 22

# Health and climate change: research priorities for local authorities

Written by [Laura Bojke](#)

Research Team: Pete Lampard, [Shainur Premji](#), Joy Adamson, [Laura Bojke](#), Karen Glerum-Brooks, Su Golder, Hilary Graham, [Dina Jankovic](#), Dagmar Zeuner



The goal of public health is to ensure the conditions in which people can live healthy lives. However, climate change, driven by increasing greenhouse gas emissions and rising global temperatures, is undermining these conditions. Climate change often affects the health of people already most at risk of ill health. This includes children, older people, poorer communities, minority communities and people with underlying health conditions.

UK policies on climate change have emphasised the importance of action by local government. Local government actions can help to protect people's health from climate related problems that can no longer be prevented, for example, through flood risk management. Many local authorities (LAs) have declared climate emergencies and have suggested ways in which they will attempt to tackle climate change. Evidence is needed to support these local actions to maximise the health benefits and make best use of limited local government budgets. Our study looked at the sort of research that LAs in England need.

First, we reviewed UK policy documents to generate a set of potential priority research areas. After receiving comments from several sustainability leaders in local health areas, we asked Directors of Public Health in England to rank the priorities via an online survey. Secondly, for the top ranked topics, we undertook rapid reviews of research evidence to find out whether there was UK evidence relating to the priorities identified in the survey. We involved a small group of members of the public in both stages of our work to reflect their concerns about climate-related risks and health.

Our results showed that two broad areas are important:

- **Community engagement and understanding:** People in communities need to be involved in the local-level actions to deal with the health impacts of climate change. There are very few studies that explore public understanding and engagement with this issue.
- **Budget implications:** We need more evidence in order to understand the short, medium and longer term costs for LAs taking action on climate change. This is especially important given the budgetary pressures on LAs and the significant costs involved in some types of actions, such as switching to electric fleets for school transport.

In both areas, our public and policy stakeholder panels pointed out the need for evidence that considers social inequalities and reflects the challenges in acting across diverse populations. Some individuals may not be able to afford to live more sustainably even if they would like to. Some policies, for example increasing electric car charge points, may discriminate against residents who are not able to make use of such facilities because they cannot access charge points due to the type of house in which they live.

Our study illustrates the need for investment in locally focused research if local governments are to deliver on the goal of protecting the public from the health impacts of climate change.

Read the full paper in [BMC Public Health](#).

**Funding was provided by the National Institute for Health and Care Research Public Health Research Programme (reference NIHR150799 - 21/527 Development Award)**

**May 2024**