



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Summary produced by the Blackfeet Environmental Office
in cooperation with the Center for Large Landscape Conservation

For more information visit blackfeetclimatechange.com

Exposure to climate-related change and disasters can cause stress, grief, and a sense of loss, as well as clinical disorders like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Climate change can even contribute to suicidal behaviors. Direct and indirect impacts of climate change can strain social relationships and increase risk of substance abuse. It can impact everyday life and perceptions and experiences as people grapple with slow and sudden changes to our world, and even as people process the threat of change. Chronic stress can lead to other negative health effects like cardiovascular disease and worsening symptoms of diabetes.

Learning about and observing the many impacts climate change is having on the environment, reading about climate-related losses in populations and species, and fearing a loss of the ability to engage in traditional activities like hunting and gathering can cause or worsen stress, depression, and anxiety. Extreme weather events impact mental health, especially when they cause property damage and loss, social disruption, and displacement. Climate change has financial implications for people who live off the land, and environmental changes like more severe and prolonged drought can impact mental health. For example, in the 1980's, farmers in the Upper Midwest experienced record drought combined with declining land values, indebtedness, and unstable prices. During this time, rates of suicide among farmers in Montana, the Dakotas, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were double the national rate.

Physical health is linked to mental health. Since climate change is predicted to negatively impact some people's physical health, it may affect their mental health as well. For example, as changes in temperature and precipitation increase allergens like ragweed pollen, people with sensitivity to ragweed pollen may find they are having more allergic reactions. Feeling sick may prevent people from doing things they enjoy, which can negatively impact mental health.

At a community level, climate change can increase interpersonal aggression, violence and crime, and social instability, and it can decrease community togetherness and cooperation.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Children, older adults, women (especially pregnant women and women who recently gave birth), people who already suffer from a mental illness, people living in poverty, and first responders are more at risk.

People who hunt, fish, gather, farm, ranch, or otherwise sustain themselves directly from the natural environment also are more at risk because their outdoor activities and livelihoods are likely to be impacted by climate change.



Pow wows, like Native American Indian Days and Heart Butte Indian Days, bring young and old together to share in celebration of a portion of Native culture and competition, fostering a sense of connection and shared identity.

HOW CAN WE ADAPT?

- Seek out professional help if you or someone you know is suffering from any level or form of mental illness or suicidal thoughts. **The number for the national suicide prevention hotline is: 1-800-273-TALK (8255).**
- Strengthen and expand existing mental health services to help people adapt to a rapidly changing world.
- Build resilience through creating opportunities for human connection and reducing social isolation. Strengthen culture and language to provide an opportunity to build connection and improve mental health in the Blackfeet Nation.
- Further strengthen social structures such as traditional societies, drum groups, sporting opportunities, 4-H, youth groups, churches, and other supportive social groups.

For more information, visit the Blackfeet Country and Climate Change website:
blackfeetclimatechange.com

Content on this page is summarized from the U.S. Global Change Research Program's report, "The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States", the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences' "A Human Health Perspective on Climate Change", and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "When Every Drop Counts" to briefly describe some of the possible health outcomes that are most relevant to Blackfeet Country. This page does not include all possible health impacts and outcomes, nor does it include all possible risks and responses. It is important to keep in mind that our decisions and actions can influence the degree to which our community will experience these impacts to our health. Being proactive and making decisions now to safeguard health will help us be more resilient. (December, 2017)