

# IN THE HOT SEAT: SAVING LIVES FROM EXTREME HEAT IN WASHINGTON STATE

## Key points

Extreme heat is serious. Heat events kill people, exacerbate chronic health issues like heart and kidney disease, drive injuries, and lead to adverse pregnancy outcomes. These impacts increase 911 calls, ambulance transports, emergency department visits, and hospital admissions. Extreme heat also causes significant individual and collective economic costs.

Some populations are more vulnerable to extreme heat: the elderly; children; pregnant people; those with chronic medical conditions; people living unsheltered, in marginal housing, or in urban heat islands; outdoor workers; people in poverty; and people not fluent in English. Extreme heat has an outsized impact on socially and politically marginalized populations such as low-income households and communities of color.

More Washingtonians will be vulnerable to extreme heat in the future due to the state's aging population, urbanization, and climate change. Climate models project 4 to 6°F summer warming in the Pacific Northwest in the 2050s relative to the last half of the 20th century and the number of extreme heat days is projected to increase on the order of five-fold by the 2050s

We know enough about the risks of extreme heat, the drivers of vulnerability, and ways to protect people to take immediate action.

## Recommendations

We recommend individuals, families, health professionals, community-based organizations, and local and state government officials across many agencies take immediate action where they have the authority and resources to act, and sustain a commitment to mitigating extreme heat as an ongoing part of their work, especially people and organizations not driven by a public health mandate.

We recommend maintaining a dual focus on shorter-term emergency response actions to save lives during an extreme heat event and on longer-term opportunities to reduce extreme heat health risks like those described in Section 3.

We recommend pursuing a portfolio of strategies to address extreme heat health risks for a number of reasons: most strategies protect only one vulnerable population while insufficiently protecting others; extreme heat can lead to cascading disasters, like power failures, that limit the effectiveness of some strategies; and redundancy is crucial when lives are at stake.

We recommend accessing and using tools and approaches like those profiled in Section 4 when additional information is needed before implementing strategies to address extreme heat health risks.

We recommend embracing the governance challenge of coordinating and empowering the diverse participants involved in implementing the health protective strategies described in Section 3 as fundamental to saving lives from extreme heat.



To access the full report, "In the Hot Seat: Saving Lives from Extreme Heat in Washington State," scan the QR code or visit: [cig.uw.edu/hot-seat-2023](http://cig.uw.edu/hot-seat-2023)

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