Extreme Cold In Albuquerque January 2025

Written by the Health Equity Council

HEALTH EQUITY COUNCIL

Serving Albuquerque and Bernalillo County

Executive Statement

Extreme cold poses significant risks to the health and safety of Albuquerque residents, particularly vulnerable populations such as the elderly, homeless, and low-income families. This policy brief outlines actionable strategies to mitigate these risks, emphasizing community resilience and resource accessibility.

Background

Bernalillo County has experienced increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, including extreme cold events, exacerbated by climate change (NASA Science, n.d.). These events have led to a rise in energy costs, increased demand for emergency services, and heightened health risks among vulnerable populations. The elderly and individuals experiencing homelessness are particularly at risk of hypothermia and frostbite, while low-income families face the dual burden of inadequate heating and soaring utility bills.

Compounding these challenges is the county's aging housing infrastructure, which often lacks proper insulation and weatherization. According to the U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit, insufficient home insulation significantly contributes to higher energy consumption and susceptibility to cold-related illnesses. Furthermore, many residents remain unaware of available resources and safety measures, which highlights the need for robust public education and outreach efforts.

Addressing these issues requires a coordinated approach that combines immediate relief efforts with long-term structural improvements. Policies aimed at strengthening community resilience, enhancing access to weatherization programs, and expanding emergency services are essential to safeguarding the health and well-being of Bernalillo County residents.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: **Develop and Expand Emergency Warming Centers.** Partner with local nonprofits and faith-based organizations to establish additional warming centers throughout the county. Studies indicate that warming centers significantly reduce hypothermia-related hospital admissions during extreme cold events.
Recommendation 2: **Increase Accessibility to Home Weatherization Programs.** Provide subsidies and streamline application processes for low-income households to access weatherization services. Local programs such as the PNM Home Weatherization program provide resources such as free installation of energy-saving products. Similarly, the EU Missions Tools Database highlights weatherization as a cost-effective method to enhance energy efficiency and reduce heating costs.
Recommendation 3: **Launch Public Awareness Campaigns.** Educate residents on preparing for extreme cold, including safe heating practices and recognizing signs of hypothermia. Public awareness initiatives in similar regions have demonstrated a 20% reduction in winter-related emergencies.
Recommendation 4: **Strengthen Utility Assistance Programs.** Advocate for increased funding and eligibility expansions for utility assistance programs. Expanded utility assistance has been shown to alleviate financial burdens for low-income families, reducing health risks associated with inadequate heating (U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit, 2014).
Recommendation 5: **Enhance Community-Based Disaster Preparedness.** Implement training programs for community leaders to coordinate localized responses during extreme cold events. Community-based preparedness initiatives improve emergency response efficiency and foster social cohesion (EU Missions Tools Database, n.d.).
Recommendation 6. **Systemic Improvements in After-Hours Transport Logistics. I**ncrease ACS staff and van availability to effectively address surge demand. To minimize the time between dispatch and pickup for after-hours ACS van services, prioritize filling vacant beds at Gibson East first. Once Gibson East reaches capacity, direct additional after-hours clients to the Westside shelter.

References:

1. NASA Science. (n.d.). Climate change. Retrieved from https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/
2. U.S. Federal Government. (2014). U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit. Retrieved from https://toolkit.climate.gov/
3. EU Missions Tools Database. (2024). Retrieved from https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/mission/solutions/tools

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