



Using the Social Vulnerability Index Tool in Emergency Preparedness

What was the issue?

Every community must prepare for and respond to extreme weather events. In New Hampshire's seacoast region, changing weather patterns pose a serious threat to coastal communities where sea levels are predicted to rise between 0.6 inches and 2 feet by 2050 and between 1.6 feet and 6.6 feet by 2100 according to the New Hampshire Coastal Risks and Hazards Commission.

What did the NH Tracking Program do?

The New Hampshire Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) Program created the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI). The SVI helps emergency responders and public health professionals identify communities that will likely need support before, during, and after a hazardous event. This web-based tool compiles 16 factors at the Census Tract level in four categories: Socioeconomic Status, Household/Disability, Minority/Language, and Housing/Transportation.

How did this improve public health?

Working with local stakeholders, public health professionals can use the SVI as part of an integrated assessment to inform the development of adaptation strategies that will improve community resilience. In one such review, partners working on a study funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) used the SVI to support local adaptation planning in the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary (HSE).

Likewise, many emergency response planning processes require an understanding of neighborhood-level social determinants of health so that emergency preparedness personnel can reach the most vulnerable residents and allocate resources as necessary. The University of New Hampshire conducted a social vulnerability assessment as a springboard for community dialogue and ongoing collaborative adaptation planning to better prepare for flood events. Social vulnerability data is being integrated with dynamic flood and wetland models to provide stakeholders with information about the changes in vulnerability under various future scenarios.

“Integration of the social vulnerability assessment with dynamic flood and wetland models was useful in supporting emergency preparedness and adaptation planning.” Semra Aytur, Associate Professor, University of New Hampshire



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