Clean Air, Healthier Communities: A Policy Advocacy Toolkit

The Latino Climate and Health Dashboard equips advocates and decision-makers with data on climate and health risks in California Latino neighborhoods.[1] This toolkit presents data from the Latino Climate and Health Dashboard and policy solutions to lessen disparities for Latino neighborhoods.

UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute

1 Latino neighborhoods are overwhelmingly located in areas facing the state's highest environmental and socioeconomic burdens.

Data: 76% of Latino neighborhoods are designated as Disadvantaged Communities (DACs), compared to just 1% of non-Latino (NL) white neighborhoods.

Context: Residents of Latino neighborhoods are far more likely to live in areas the California government designates as having the highest combined pollution burdens and socioeconomic stressors.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **The California State Legislature** should continue to direct cap-and-trade proceeds (SB 535/AB 1550) to DACs for air, mobility, and health projects. These funds can help CBOs take on leadership roles in local air quality efforts under the Community Air Protection Program (CAPP), as established by AB 617.

   Advocates[2] have emphasized supporting local CBOs to lead outreach, education, and monitoring in pollution-burdened neighborhoods.

2. **The California State Legislature** should ensure that climate investment funding continues prioritizing DACs, maintaining the CAPP target of directing at least 70% of total funds to projects that benefit these communities.

   Community members have noted the need for sustained, equitable funding to support longterm education, monitoring, and mitigation initiatives in high-burden neighborhoods.

2 Latino neighborhoods are located much closer to hazardous and contaminated sites than NL white neighborhoods.

Data: Residents in Latino neighborhoods have nearly 10x higher proximity score for Risk Management Plan (RMP) facilities (1.9 vs. 0.2), a 3x higher exposure score for hazardous waste facilities (0.9 vs. 0.3), and a 2.4x higher proximity score for cleanup sites (12 vs. 5), compared to NL white neighborhoods.

Context: Living near toxic sites puts residents in Latino neighborhoods at significantly higher risk for chemical accidents and chronic exposure to hazardous substances. These exposures are linked to long-term illnesses, including cancer and adverse birth outcomes, and can compound other environmental and social stressors these communities face.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)** should accelerate cleanup assessments and dust control measures, and offer temporary relocation when contamination poses immediate risks—especially to residents living in DACs.

2. **DTSC** should prioritize grant funding from the Equitable Community Revitalization Grant (ECRG) program for sites in DACs, such as contaminated properties or former industrial sites in need of cleanup and safe redevelopment.

3. **DTSC and the California Office of Emergency Services** should require RMP facilities to implement multilingual emergency communication plans, invest in neighborhood air monitoring, and support community preparedness drills in nearby DACs.

   Community members noted the need for more transparent, culturally competent communication about environmental hazards.

4. **Local governments** should incorporate environmental justice policies into general plans (as outlined in SB 1000) to prevent the construction of new hazardous facilities in DACs and to support long-term land-use protections for vulnerable neighborhoods.

3 Latino neighborhoods are exposed to nearly three times more diesel pollution than NL white neighborhoods.

Data: Residents in Latino neighborhoods are exposed to 0.27 tons of diesel particulate matter (PM) per year, which is 2.7 times higher than the 0.10 tons per year that residents in NL white neighborhoods are exposed to.

Context: Diesel PM is classified as a Toxic Air Contaminant in California. Higher exposure increases the risk of lung cancer and worsens respiratory conditions such as asthma and chronic bronchitis, especially among children, older adults, and people with preexisting health conditions.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **CARB** should prioritize its Hybrid and Zero-Emission Truck and Bus Voucher Incentive Program (HVIP) and CAPP incentives to help cover the cost of zero-emission commercial vehicle infrastructure and fleets in DACs.

   Advocates recommended state-supported incentives for residents to transition to cleaner vehicles and reduce diesel exposure.

2. **Local governments** should enforce anti-idling laws near schools and clinics and support truck rerouting, port electrification, and electric holding yards to reduce diesel emissions in high-traffic areas.

4 Latino neighborhoods face higher traffic pollution and have fewer clean vehicles than NL white neighborhoods.

Data: Latino neighborhoods experience 1.4 times higher traffic density than NL white neighborhoods (1,167 km/hr vs. 830 km/hr). At the same time, low-emission vehicle (LEV) ownership is nearly four times lower, with only 3% of residents owning LEVs, compared to 11% in NL white neighborhoods.

Context: These disparities mean Latino neighborhoods are exposed to more traffic-related air pollution, a major driver of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other health risks, while having significantly fewer clean vehicles in their neighborhoods to help reduce emissions and improve air quality.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **The California state government** should prioritize the Clean Cars 4 All Program, which has provided millions of dollars to low-income consumers to purchase or lease a new or used clean vehicle in exchange for scrapping older, more polluting ones, targeting outreach in Latino neighborhoods.

   Note: Effective implementation would require the state to invest in an equitable distribution of charging infrastructure in DACs.

   Advocates highlighted programs to increase access to clean vehicles as a top priority.

2. **City transportation departments** should prioritize "Complete Streets" upgrades in high-pollution areas. This approach makes streets safer for all travelers by adding features such as bus lanes and protected bike lanes. It can also include timed delivery windows, which limit large commercial or freight deliveries to specific hours (not everyday household deliveries) to cut double-parking and peak-hour traffic. Departments should also adopt congestion-reduction strategies, such as expanding public transit service or introducing congestion pricing.

3. **In high-traffic neighborhoods, CARB and local air districts** should prioritize CAPP funds for sidewalk, bike lane, and urban greening projects.

4. **Metropolitan Planning Organizations** should use Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program funds to support projects that reduce traffic and improve air quality in Latino neighborhoods. These efforts should be integrated into regional transportation plans to maximize impact.

5. **CARB** should leverage the Air Pollution Control Fund, which collects revenue from fines, fees, and penalties imposed on polluters, to fund targeted emissions-reduction projects in communities most impacted by pollution. These funds should be prioritized for projects that address cumulative environmental burdens in DACs, such as zero-emissions infrastructure, air filtration programs, and neighborhood-level mitigation (e.g., tree planting, clean mobility options).

   Community members emphasized expanding urban greening, sidewalk improvements, and public transit to reduce traffic and protect community health.

Notes:

[1] Latino neighborhood = Any census tract where more than 70% of the residents identify as Latino. NL white neighborhood = census tract where more than 70% of the residents identify as NL white.

[2] When we mention advocates/community members, we are referring to clean air advocates that we have spoken to about their air pollution and health policy priorities through LPPI programming.