UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute
Climate & Health Dashboard

Rising Heat, Unequal Risks: A Policy Toolkit for Latino Communities in the Central Valley of California

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Acknowledgments

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We extend our sincere appreciation to Artie Padilla and the Central Valley Community Foundation for their partnership and collaboration. We are especially grateful to the 23 participants of the Policy Pláticas whose insights and lived experiences helped shape the recommendations in this toolkit. This work reflects their voices and shared commitment to advancing equitable policy solutions for all Californians.

This policy toolkit builds on data from LPPI's Latino Climate and Health Dashboard.

The UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute acknowledges the Gabrielino and Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin and Southern Channel Islands) and that their displacement has enabled UCLA's flourishing. As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), Ahiihirom (Elders), and Eyoohiinken (our relatives' nations), past, present, and emerging.

Disclaimer

Although this policy toolkit centers on Latino communities, the challenges it addresses are not unique to Latinos. Communities of color and low-income populations more broadly also face disproportionate environmental burdens. Our Latino focus reflects the scope of our research center rather than the exclusivity of the issue.

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the University of California, Los Angeles. The authors alone are responsible for the content of this report.

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Executive Summary

Extreme heat is a growing public health concern in California's Central Valley, and its impacts are not felt equally. Latino communities across the region face disproportionate exposure to extreme heat due to long-standing structural inequities that shape where people live and work. As climate change drives longer, more intense heat waves, the Central Valley, already one of the hottest regions in the state, faces an increasing risk of extreme heat. For residents of Latino neighborhoods, extreme heat compounds existing environmental, occupational, and health burdens, increasing the likelihood of heat-related illness, worsening chronic conditions, and even premature death.

To address these disparities, the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute (LPPI) convened the **Extreme Heat and Latino Health Policy Plática** in November 2025. The Policy Plática brought together 23 community advocates, organizers, and legislative staff working in the Central Valley. Participants shared lived experiences, identified barriers to heat protection, and co-developed policy solutions across three key areas: health and public services; the built environment and housing; and workforce protections and economic equity. To provide context for these community-driven insights, we analyzed data from LPPI's Latino Climate and Health Dashboard and found inequities in environmental exposure and health outcomes affecting Latino neighborhoods across the region. In addition to sharing findings from the Policy Plática and our data analysis, this toolkit provides recommendations to strengthen evidence-based advocacy and support more equitable outcomes for Latino communities across the state.

Example Community Policy Priorities from the Policy Plática:

1. Strengthen protections against workplace exposure to extreme heat by expanding multilingual outreach and increasing inspections in high-risk industries.

2. Invest in neighborhood cooling by planting trees in Disadvantaged Communities[1] and provide dedicated funding for long-term tree maintenance.

3. Expand community-based health interventions by funding *promotoras* and other trusted organizations to deliver health education, outreach, and navigation services.

4. Advance accountability and data-driven planning by aligning climate, health, labor, and land-use policies with measurable goals that prioritize Latino neighborhoods most impacted by extreme heat.

Key Findings from the Latino Climate and Health Dashboard:

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

2. Latino neighborhoods have about one-fourth of the tree canopy coverage of non-Latino (NL) white neighborhoods in the Central Valley.

3. Central Valley Latino neighborhoods have more than double the share of workers employed in heat-exposed industries than in NL white neighborhoods.

4. Residents in Central Valley Latino neighborhoods experience 1.5x higher rates of asthma-related emergency department visits than residents in NL white neighborhoods.

5. Latino neighborhoods in the Central Valley experience heat waves (consecutive days of extreme heat) that last 1.4 times longer than NL white neighborhoods.

Introduction

Background

Latino communities in California's Central Valley face disproportionate health and environmental burdens due to long-standing systemic inequities that shape where people live and work. As extreme heat intensifies in the Central Valley, these issues become even more pressing. Climate change is driving longer, hotter summers. Extreme heat is directly linked to heat-related illness and can exacerbate chronic conditions such as diabetes, chronic kidney disease, and cardiovascular disease.[2]

Extreme heat in the Central Valley disproportionately affects already marginalized communities, compounding long-standing economic and health disparities. For example, Latino residents are more likely to experience greater heat exposure due to overlapping factors in their built environments (e.g., the amount of concrete in their neighborhoods), occupations, and housing conditions, which together limit access to protective cooling and increase physical distress.[3] Farmworkers, who are predominantly Latino in this region, face a risk of heat-related death 35 times higher than the average U.S. worker, reflecting the consequences of prolonged outdoor labor.[4]

Housing conditions further heighten heat vulnerability. Approximately 60 percent of Central Valley homes were built before 1980 and often lack adequate insulation or safe electrical capacity to support air conditioning, limiting residents' ability to maintain safe indoor temperatures during extreme heat events.[5] Differences in the built environment across neighborhoods also worsen heat exposure. Latino neighborhoods in the Central Valley tend to have fewer trees and more paved surfaces, which trap heat and make these areas significantly hotter than surrounding communities.[6]

Local and statewide officials increasingly recognize extreme heat as a public health priority and have implemented initiatives that support cooling centers, home energy upgrades, urban greening, and community outreach.[7] Worker protections and heat-safety education remain essential, particularly in outdoor industries where exposure to heat is highest.[8] However, persistent gaps in access, implementation capacity, and reliable cooling infrastructure demonstrate that existing protections and resources do not reach all neighborhoods equally.

About the Extreme Heat and Latino Health Policy Plática

UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute's (LPPI) commitment to amplifying community voices guided UCLA LPPI's Extreme Heat and Latino Health Policy Plática (discussion), held virtually in November 2025. The convening brought together representatives from advocacy

organizations, local organizers, and legislative staff invested in addressing extreme heat and improving health outcomes in the Central Valley. The purpose of the convening was to co-develop policy recommendations grounded in lived experience and professional expertise.

We invited participants to join one of three breakout groups based on their stated policy interests: 1) Health & Public Services, 2) Built Environment & Housing, and 3) Workforce Protections & Economic Equity. To guide the discussions, we encouraged participants to approach each topic from three perspectives:

- Highlight strengths, successes, and best practices
- Identify challenges and barriers
- Brainstorm bold and innovative solutions

We informed participants that we would use their contributions to develop this toolkit. We assured them their identities would remain anonymous and encouraged them to share professional insights and personal experiences openly.

About the Latino Climate and Health Dashboard

The Latino Climate and Health Dashboard is a data tool that equips advocates and decision-makers with data on climate and health risks in California's Latino neighborhoods. The dashboard brings together data that reflects long-standing disparities, many of which mirror the lived experiences of Latino communities across the Central Valley and state at large.

About This Toolkit

Part 1 of this toolkit presents the key challenges and corresponding policy solutions discussed in each of the Policy Plática breakout groups. **Part 2** highlights findings from the Latino Climate and Health Dashboard that point to disproportionate environmental and health burdens in the Central Valley's Latino neighborhoods and provides data-driven policy recommendations to mitigate these burdens. Together, the recommendations from Parts 1 and 2 aim to strengthen evidence-based advocacy and support more equitable outcomes for Latino communities across the state.

PART ONE

Challenges and Co-Created Policy Recommendations

This section summarizes the challenges identified and the recommendations discussed by each Policy Plática breakout group, organized by topic area. Each area includes both priority recommendations that are feasible in the near term with existing tools or funding and long-term or aspirational recommendations that require sustained investment, interagency collaboration, or major policy change.

A. Health & Public Services

Community-Identified Challenges

1. Language barriers and fear limit access to health services.

Participants noted that many Latino and Indigenous residents face language barriers when seeking cooling centers or medical care. Additionally, fear of employer retaliation, immigration enforcement, or employer consequences discourages people from seeking help for heat-related illnesses.

2. A lack of affordable health insurance restricts care-seeking.

Community members emphasized that many workers, particularly field and contract workers, lack access to affordable medical insurance. Even with health insurance subsidies, high medical care costs prevent people from seeking preventive or emergency care.

3. Limited education on heat-related illness and compound exposures increases risk.

Community members reported gaps in knowledge about recognizing heat-related symptoms and responding early, especially among outdoor workers. due to staffing limitations or other resource constraints.

4. Cooling centers are underfunded and perceived as unsafe or inaccessible.

Participants shared concerns about cooling centers closing due to budget constraints. Additionally, participants noted that many families feel unsafe bringing children or elders to cooling centers due to stigma, lack of inclusivity, or perceptions that cooling centers are only for unhoused populations.

Community-Identified Challenges

5. Poor housing conditions exacerbate heat-related health impacts.

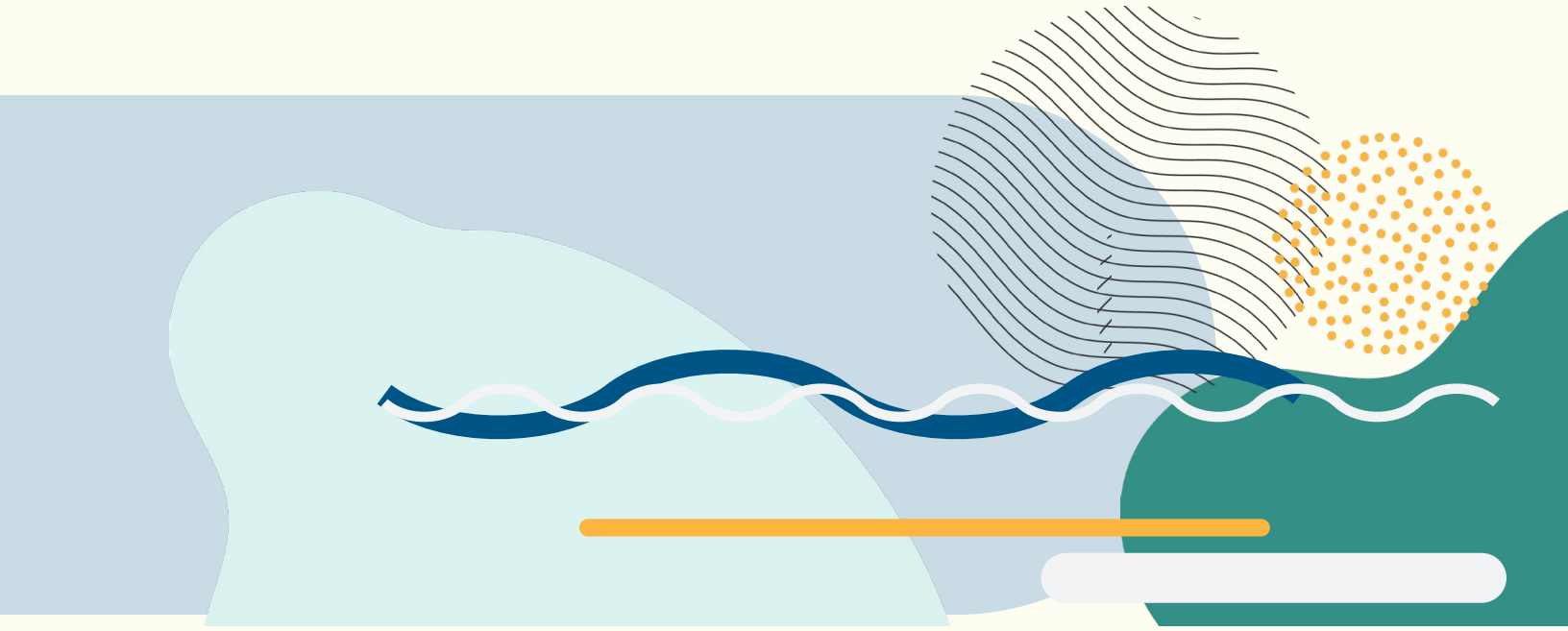
Residents living in older, poorly insulated housing reported relying on air conditioning despite concerns about dirty pipes that can create poor indoor air quality and may contribute to additional health issues.

6. Elders and offline residents face more limited access to information about heat risks.

Participants noted that older adults and residents without internet or social media access often miss heat alerts, health guidance, and other relevant information shared online, leaving them vulnerable during periods of extreme heat.

7. Workplace conditions increase heat-related health risks.

Participants described pressure from employers to skip breaks, limit water intake, and rush work, especially in contract-based jobs. Inconsistent enforcement of heat safety policies contributes to heatstroke, kidney damage, and long-term health impacts.



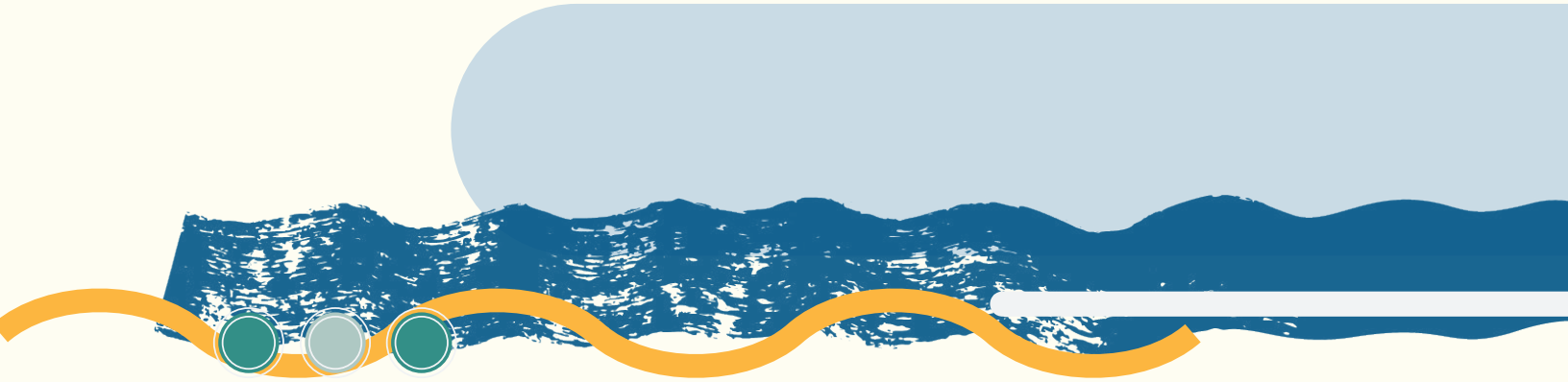
Community-Identified Policy Recommendations

Near-Term Priorities

1. **County and local public health departments should expand their in-person heat illness education and outreach efforts.** Participants emphasized the need for hands-on, in-person training sessions to help residents recognize heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and long-term risks such as kidney damage and skin cancer. Training sessions should account for age, chronic illness, and compounding exposures such as pesticides, and include clear guidance on treatment and prevention.

2. **County agencies and funders should prioritize resources for grassroots and emerging community-based organizations (CBOs).** Participants emphasized that newer, smaller organizations are often more trusted and better connected to workers and families than government entities. However, these organizations are often underfunded. Funding should be redirected to support organizations doing direct outreach in fields and communities.

3. **Public health agencies and community organizations should conduct outreach directly in work settings.** Participants repeatedly stated that organizations must "go to the fields" to reach workers where they are. Outreach efforts should accommodate workers' schedules and include on-site distribution of educational materials and resources. data collection.



Community-Identified Policy Recommendations

Long-term/Aspirational

1. **State agencies should institutionalize heat alert systems similar to air quality warning programs.** Participants envisioned a statewide heat exposure notification system that integrates public health guidance, hydration reminders, and real-time risk information, particularly for outdoor workers and vulnerable populations.

2. **State labor and health agencies should require standardized, verifiable heat safety training.** Participants recommended requiring supervisors to submit proof of training delivery, such as videos or digital modules, to prevent box-checking practices that fail to protect workers.

B. Built Environment & Housing

Community-Identified Challenges

1. Inefficient housing increases heat exposure and energy costs.

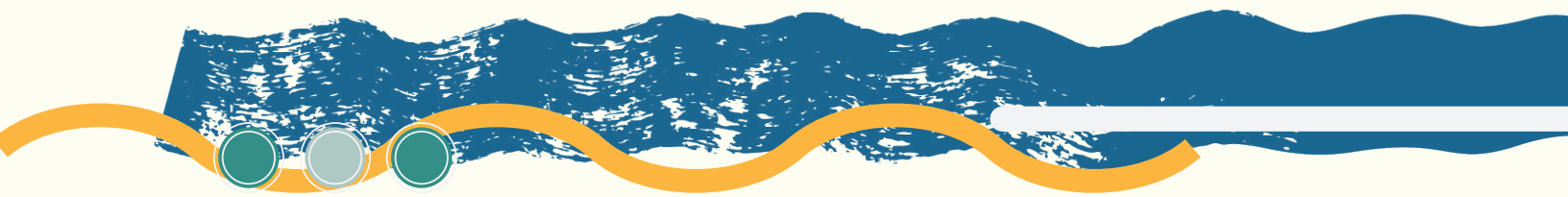
Participants described the challenges older homes face, such as poor insulation, limited or outdated cooling systems, and high electricity costs. Even when air conditioning is available, many families cannot afford to use it, forcing them to endure unsafe indoor temperatures during extreme heat.

2. Low tree canopy (and thus, less shade) intensifies neighborhood heat.

Participants emphasized that limited tree cover makes Latino neighborhoods significantly hotter. Trees were described not only as cooling infrastructure but as essential to making neighborhoods livable, encouraging people to go outside and connect with neighbors, and reducing reliance on costly indoor cooling.

3. Maintenance and funding gaps undermine long-term solutions.

Even when trees or green infrastructure are installed, participants noted the absence of dedicated funding and policies for ongoing maintenance, watering, and upkeep. Without sustained investment, these interventions risk failing or imposing additional financial burdens on residents and property owners, as they are left to maintain trees and other green infrastructure.



Community-Identified Challenges

4. Renters face additional barriers due to landlord control and housing conditions.

Participants highlighted that renters often lack the authority to make home upgrades, while landlords may resist investments related to cooling, insulation, or environmental safety. Broader housing quality issues, such as lead paint and aging infrastructure, compound heat-related risks for children and families.

5. Information about resources and programs is difficult to access.

Participants stressed that many residents, particularly non-English speakers, struggle to access information about tree programs, cooling resources, or housing assistance. Information is often fragmented, technical, or buried on websites, limiting participation even when programs exist.

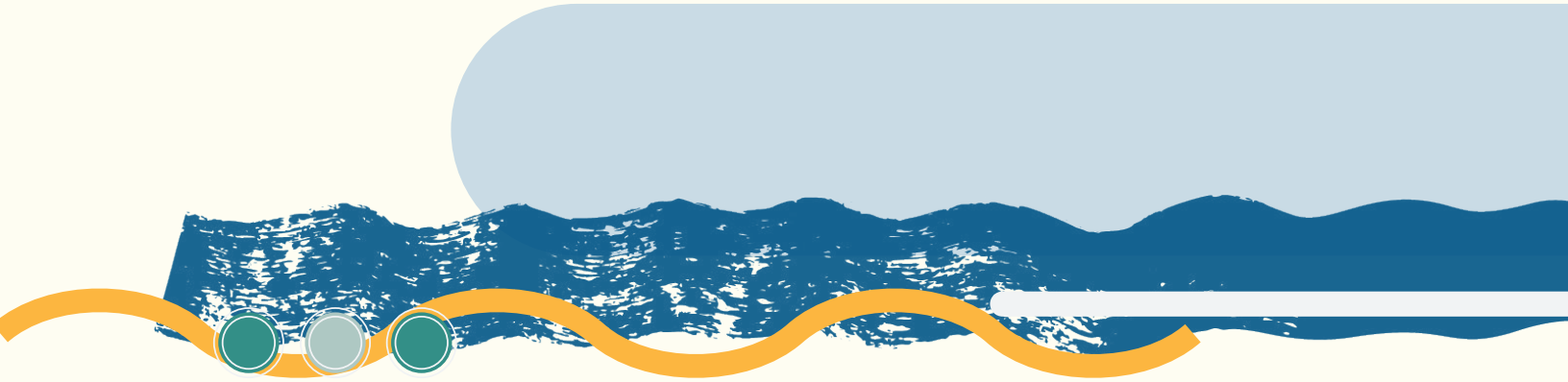
Community-Identified Policy Recommendations

Near-Term Priorities

1. **Cities and counties should use data-driven tools to target cooling and green infrastructure investments.** Census tract–level data, tree canopy metrics, and tools such as CalEnviroScreen[9] can be used to prioritize funding for neighborhoods with the highest combined heat, pollution, and housing burdens.

2. **Local governments should tie state and local funding to measurable goals for tree canopy and cooler temperatures.** Leveraging incoming funding and measures, such as Measure P,[10] to set clear, trackable targets for increasing tree canopy is key, including benchmarks for planting, replacement, and early-stage maintenance.

3. **Local governments should engage communities early in planning and design processes.** Participants encouraged continued and expanded community surveys, focus groups, and partnerships with emergency services and CBOs to ensure that housing and neighborhood design reflect local priorities, thereby improving housing standards and providing more green infrastructure.



Community-Identified Policy Recommendations

Long-term/Aspirational

1. **State and local agencies, such as the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and Public Works Departments, should invest in long-term maintenance capacity and workforce development.** Participants advocated for ongoing tree maintenance, including training and licensing programs for arborists and technicians, to address workforce shortages and ensure newly planted trees survive and provide lasting benefits.

C. Workforce Protections & Economic Equity

Community-Identified Challenges

1. Chronic heat exposure leads to severe and cumulative health impacts.

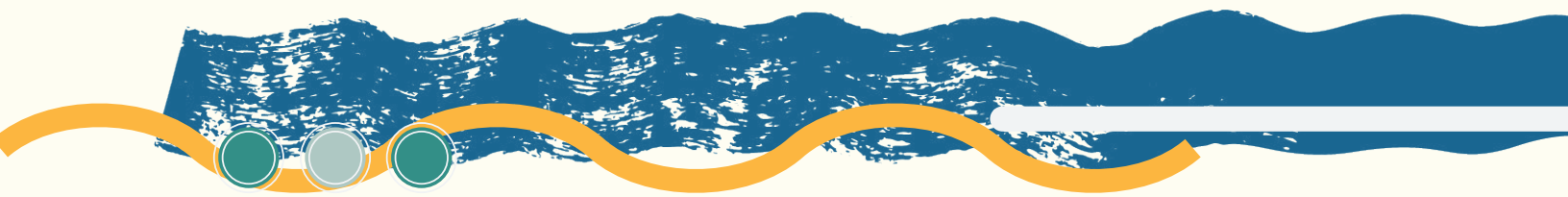
Participants described how Latino workers in agriculture, construction, landscaping, and roofing face heat exhaustion, heat stroke, dehydration, kidney damage, and long-term health consequences from prolonged exposure to extreme heat, often without adequate shade, cooling, or protective measures.

2. Heat-related illnesses directly threaten the economic stability of individuals and their families.

Workers shared that becoming sick from heat exposure often means missing workdays and losing wages. Many delay healthcare because they lack insurance or are deterred by the high cost of care. Additionally, for workers in already economically burdened households, taking time off to recover or attend health appointments is often not feasible, forcing workers to choose between their health and their income.

3. Workplace protections are not commensurate with heat-related risks.

Participants questioned whether employer practices and protections match the level of danger workers face. Participants noted that while heat precautions exist in other sectors (e.g., postponing outdoor youth sporting events during extreme heat days), similar standards are not consistently applied or visible for outdoor workers.



Community-Identified Challenges

4. Limited access to cooling, water, and rest during the workday jeopardizes worker well-being.

Construction and agricultural workers often lack access to adequate shade, cooling centers, water, and protected rest breaks, particularly during peak heat hours. Even where cooling centers exist, transportation barriers and unclear outreach limit workers' ability to use them.

5. Fear of retaliation and immigration enforcement suppresses reporting.

Workers hesitate to speak up about unsafe conditions due to fear of retaliation, job loss, or immigration-related consequences. Concerns about increased activity by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) further discourage reporting and self-advocacy.

6. Lack of clear, accessible information about worker rights.

Participants emphasized that even when legal protections exist, information about rights, safety standards, and available resources is not consistently shared at worksites, especially in Spanish or other languages spoken by workers.

7. Mental health impacts on workers extend to families and youth.

Physically demanding labor, chronic stress, and economic pressure take a toll on workers' mental health and family well-being. Participants highlighted that these conditions affect parents' ability to be present and place emotional strain on children.

- Stress caused by work and economic strain is not limited to adults; many young people in the region enter the workforce early to support their families and suffer similar mental distress.

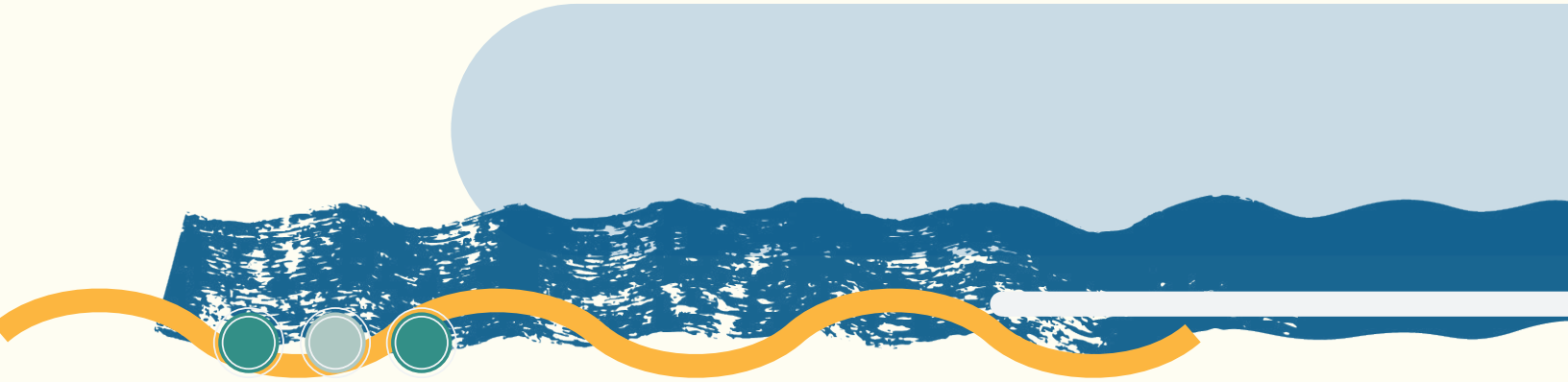
Community-Identified Policy Recommendations

Near-Term Priorities

1. **State and local labor agencies should strengthen and enforce heat standards that reflect real working conditions.** Participants emphasized that current requirements for shade and cooling are insufficient in practice. Enforcement should ensure that all workers have adequate shade, access to effective cooling (not just tarps), cold drinking water, and protected rest breaks during peak heat hours.

2. **Employers should be required to visibly and accessibly communicate worker rights in the field.** Worker rights and heat safety information should be posted and delivered in Spanish and other relevant languages, using formats that reach workers without break rooms, such as field-based signage, brief on-site presentations, and verbal briefings during paid work time.

3. **CBOs should expand worker-centered education and advocacy.** Providing heat illness education, rights training, and retaliation-response resources directly to workers is key, emphasizing that advocacy can lead to protections and support when employers fail to comply.



Near-Term Priorities

4. **Employers should provide workers with paid time off for heat safety education during the workday.** Participants stressed that workers cannot attend training sessions outside work hours. Policies should require employers to allocate 20–30 minutes of paid time per week for education on heat illness symptoms, prevention, and worker rights.

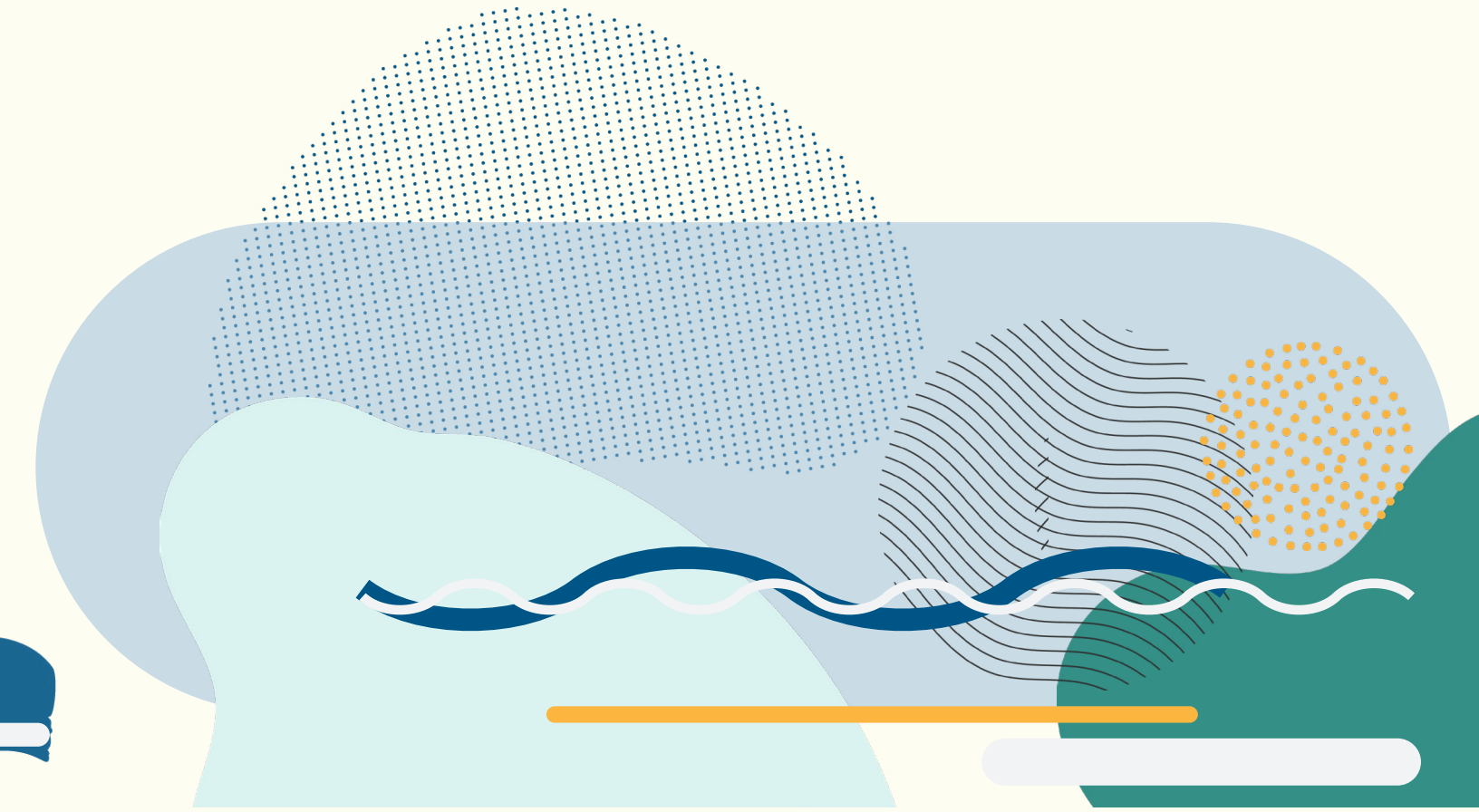
5. **Local and state governments should incentivize employer compliance and leadership.** Recognition programs, public reporting, and financial incentives such as tax credits can encourage employers, particularly farm owners and contractors, to adopt stronger heat protection measures and demonstrate accountability.

Community-Identified Policy Recommendations

Long-term/Aspirational

1. **Establish a rebuttable presumption that heat-related injuries are work-related.** Participants supported treating heat illness as presumptively work-related for workers' compensation, creating an economic incentive for employers to prevent injuries and protect workers' health and wages.

2. **Develop worker-centered monitoring and early warning systems.** Innovative approaches such as body temperature monitoring, wearable alerts, or heat-exposure tracking tools should be piloted alongside stronger worker protections, ensuring that responsibility rests with employers and policymakers rather than solely on workers.



PART TWO

Insights from the Latino Climate and Health Dashboard

This section highlights key findings for the Central Valley using data from the Latino Climate and Health Dashboard[11] (LCHD) and presents potential policy solutions developed by LPPI staff to reduce disparities in Latino neighborhoods. Additionally, it highlights solutions and ideas that overlap with topics discussed during the Policy Plática. Please visit the LCHD website for more information on the data presented below.[12]

For this analysis, we define a Latino neighborhood as any census tract[13] in the Central Valley where more than 70 percent of residents identify as Latino. Latino residents include those who identify as Hispanic or Latino regardless of race. To highlight disparities, we compare health and environmental outcomes between Latino and non-Latino (NL) white neighborhoods. We define an NL white neighborhood as any census tract where more than 70 percent of residents identify as NL white. We use NL white comparison as it is the standard disparity benchmark in environmental and health equity research.

Finding 1: Latino neighborhoods in the Central Valley are overwhelmingly located in areas designated by the state as having the highest environmental and socioeconomic burdens.

Data: Almost all (93 percent) of the Latino neighborhoods in the Central Valley are designated as Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) under SB 535,[14] compared to just 4 percent of NL white neighborhoods.

Context: Residents of Latino neighborhoods are far more likely to live in areas the California government has designated as having the highest combined pollution burdens and socioeconomic stressors. These designations signal poor access to clean air and water, an increased risk of chronic health problems, and greater vulnerability to climate-related threats such as extreme heat.

Policy Recommendations

1. **The California State Legislature** should ensure that climate investment funding continues to prioritize DACs, maintaining the Community Air Protection Program (CAPP) target of directing at least 70 percent of total funds to projects that benefit DACs.[15]
    - » Participants emphasized that funding must be accessible to smaller CBOs via fiscal sponsorship and technical assistance, as smaller CBOs are often the most trusted messengers for local outreach.
2. **County health departments** should adopt Extreme Heat Guidance[16] and Cooling Center Activation[17] protocols in DACs and integrate them into Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) coordination with hospitals, first responders, emergency services, and education institutions. This integration should include clear outreach and dissemination strategies to inform communities about heat risks, cooling resources, and activation procedures.

Finding 2: On average, Latino neighborhoods have about one-fourth the tree canopy coverage of NL white neighborhoods in the Central Valley.

Data: Tree canopy[18] coverage is much lower in Central Valley Latino neighborhoods; only 5 percent of land is covered by trees compared to 21 percent in NL white neighborhoods.

Context: Tree canopy can help reduce surface and ambient temperatures, preventing overexposure to heat. Tree canopy provides shade, reduces outdoor ambient and surface temperatures, and can encourage lower energy consumption for indoor cooling. Lower canopy coverage amplifies heat exposure and vulnerability, particularly for residents who rely on public transit or walking, work outdoors, or do not have air conditioning in their homes.

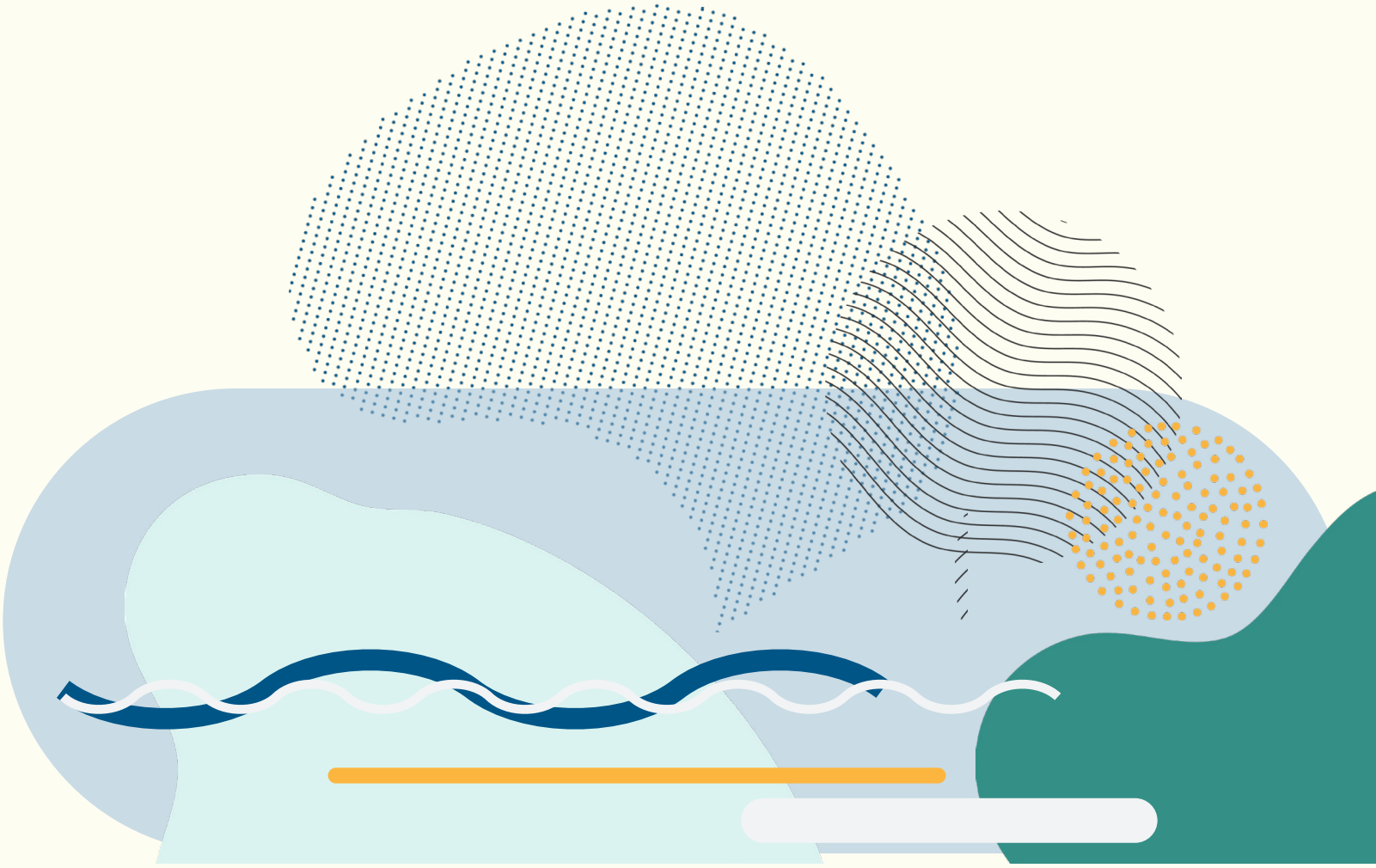
Policy Recommendations

1. **State policymakers** should require Central Valley counties to adopt minimum urban tree canopy targets for DACs. The state can tie measurable canopy expansion milestones (e.g., increasing tree cover from approximately 5 percent to 20 percent by 2040) and require reporting on tree survival.[19]
    - » Setting minimum urban tree canopy targets requires ensuring that all tree-planting projects include funded long-term maintenance plans for watering, pruning, and replacement. Participants noted that without dedicated maintenance funding, new trees often die or become a financial burden on residents already struggling with water bills.
2. **State and local agencies** should invest in long-term maintenance capacity and workforce development to support ongoing tree care. This includes training and licensing programs for arborists and technicians to address workforce shortages and ensure newly planted trees survive and deliver lasting benefits.

3. **Local governments and regional planners** should use the Tree Equity Score[20] to identify and prioritize low-canopy, high-heat neighborhoods for tree planting and long-term canopy protection and to track progress toward tree equity goals over time.

4. **School districts, transit agencies, and local governments** should coordinate to add trees or shade structures at schools, childcare centers, bus stops, and along busy pedestrian zones to protect high-use active transportation routes relied upon by children, elders, and transit-dependent residents, particularly in neighborhoods with high exposure to extreme heat.

    » Zip codes with high extreme heat exposure can be identified using Cal Heat Score.[21]



Finding 3: On average, Central Valley Latino neighborhoods have more than double the share of workers employed in heat-exposed industries than NL white neighborhoods.

Data: In the Central Valley, about 40 percent of workers in Latino neighborhoods are employed in heat-exposed industries, compared to 18 percent in NL white neighborhoods.

Context: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, heat-exposed industries include agriculture, construction, warehousing, transportation, and waste management. Workers in these sectors face prolonged occupational heat exposure, increasing the risk of heat-related illness such as heat stroke and exhaustion.

Policy Recommendations

1. **The California Governor and Legislature** should increase funding for the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (CalOSHA) to address staffing shortages that limit inspections in heat-exposed industries and improve oversight and accountability for employers operating in high-heat regions such as California's Central Valley.

2. **CalOSHA and the Department of Industrial Relations** should strengthen multilingual outreach and enforcement of Heat Illness Prevention standards[22] in the Central Valley by conducting targeted inspections in agriculture, construction, warehousing, transportation, and waste management sectors and ensuring strong implementation of CalOSHA Indoor Heat Rule (2024)[23] for indoor workspaces once temperatures reach 82°F.

Finding 4: Residents in Central Valley Latino neighborhoods experience 1.5x higher rates of asthma-related emergency department visits on average than residents in NL white neighborhoods.

Data: The rate of asthma-related emergency department (ED) visits in Central Valley Latino neighborhoods is 77 per 10,000 residents, compared to 51 per 10,000 residents in NL white neighborhoods.

Context: Extreme heat exposure poses serious health risks, especially for people with conditions such as heart disease, asthma, diabetes, and obesity. Heat places extra stress on the body, can worsen respiratory symptoms, and increases the risk of medical emergencies. When combined with other environmental exposures, such as poor air quality, residents of Latino neighborhoods face compounding risks that drive higher rates of asthma-related ED visits.

Policy Recommendations

1. **The California Department of Public Health (CDPH)** should support Central Valley county health departments in expanding community-based asthma and heat-health initiatives, including asthma home visit programs, heat-risk outreach, and cooling resource navigation services. These programs should prioritize households in Latino neighborhoods and patients with frequent emergency department visits and should incorporate home-based interventions such as environmental trigger assessments, cooling equipment assessment, heat safety education, medication support, and linkage to clinical care and local cooling resources.[24]

    - » Participants identified *promotoras* (community health workers) as the most effective bridge for helping families navigate the healthcare system, access resources, and understand the connection between heat exposure and respiratory health.

2. **School districts** in DACs should use CalSHAPE (AB 841)[25] grants to upgrade HVAC systems and install high-efficiency air filters, ensuring that schools remain cool, safe, and clean-air places for children during heat and smog events.

    - » Participants emphasized the need for school-based asthma management plans that explicitly account for extreme heat days, as children are among the most sensitive to temperature spikes.

3. **Public health authorities** should design a tracking system to monitor heat-related morbidity and mortality and mandate an annual report. This system should include data from hospitals and urgent care facilities in close to real time. The data needs to be stratified by geography (ZIP code, county) and demographic variables (age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status); merged with weather and environmental information; and designed to trigger alerts when abnormal increases occur.[26]

    » Using such surveillance systems will help policymakers detect hotspots, monitor trends, evaluate interventions, and engage in adaptive policymaking to support targeted interventions.

Finding 5: Latino neighborhoods in the Central Valley experience heat waves (consecutive days of extreme heat) that last 1.4 times longer on average than heat waves in NL white neighborhoods.

Data: Central Valley Latino neighborhoods experience significantly longer periods of extreme heat NL white neighborhoods. Heat waves in Latino neighborhoods last an average of 86 consecutive days in comparison to 62 days in NL white neighborhoods.

Context: Defined as the consecutive number of days where the daily temperature reaches at least 90°F, heat waves are often more harmful than short heat spikes. This sustained period of physiological stress, with little opportunity to recover, makes individuals with chronic illnesses, outdoor workers, elders, and young children particularly vulnerable.

Policy Recommendations

1. **State agencies[27] implementing** Assembly Bill 2238[28] should ensure the statewide extreme heat ranking system moves beyond data collection and functions as a trigger for automatic protective actions in the communities most at risk.
    - » Heat rankings should trigger timely interventions, including multilingual public alerts, expanded cooling center hours, temporary moratoriums on utility shutoffs, and targeted CalOSHA workplace inspections.
2. **The Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES),[29]** in partnership with CDPH, should strengthen early warning systems that communicate sustained heat risk to vulnerable residents and workers through multiple channels. Alerts should be multilingual and go beyond digital channels to include radio, text, mailed materials, and outreach through utility companies, employers, schools, and trusted community partners, senior centers, and promotoras de salud (community health workers).
    - » Participants noted that many residents, especially elders and farmworkers, do not use social media; they rely instead on outreach models led by trusted local organizations.

3. **Local governments** should develop and adopt "Heat Action Plans" that leverage state funding (like the Community Resilience Centers program)[30] to transform libraries and community centers into "Resilience Hubs." These hubs should offer extended hours, backup power, and family-friendly services during heat waves.

    » The Fresno City Council noted that these resilience hubs must be located within walking distance of residential areas because heat exposure is high among those relying on public transit to reach cooling sites.

4. **The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)[31] and investor-owned utilities** should strengthen and standardize shutoff protections and bill relief policies during declared heat emergencies. While existing customer protections and medical baseline programs provide some safeguards, protections currently vary across utilities and are not uniformly triggered by extreme heat conditions. Establishing consistent, heat-responsive shutoff protections would help ensure households, particularly in DACs and medically vulnerable residents, are not disconnected from electricity when cooling is most critical.

Conclusion

Latino communities in California's Central Valley face disproportionate risks from extreme heat due to overlapping environmental, occupational, and housing vulnerabilities. Heat exposure is not only a climate issue but also a social equity and public health concern. Community-driven insights from the Policy Plática and data analysis from the Latino Climate and Health Dashboard demonstrate that Latino neighborhoods in the Central Valley experience compounded risks, including limited shade, higher rates of workers employed in heat-exposed industries, poor housing conditions, and increased health vulnerabilities such as asthma and chronic illness.

Addressing these inequities requires coordinated, multi-level strategies. Priority interventions include expanding multilingual heat outreach, ensuring workplace protections reflect real conditions, investing in urban greening and cooling infrastructure, and supporting grassroots organizations trusted by communities. Long-term approaches, such as institutionalizing heat safety monitoring, strengthening protections for tree canopy, and aligning climate, health, and housing planning, can create lasting resilience against extreme heat. Ultimately, the recommendations in this toolkit aim to equip policymakers, advocates, and community leaders with actionable, evidence-based strategies to reduce heat-related harms and build a more just, climate-resilient Central Valley.

Endnotes

[1] Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, "SB 535 Disadvantaged Communities," accessed September 29, 2025, available online.

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[27] The state agencies responsible for this include California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), the Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program (ICARP) within the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES).

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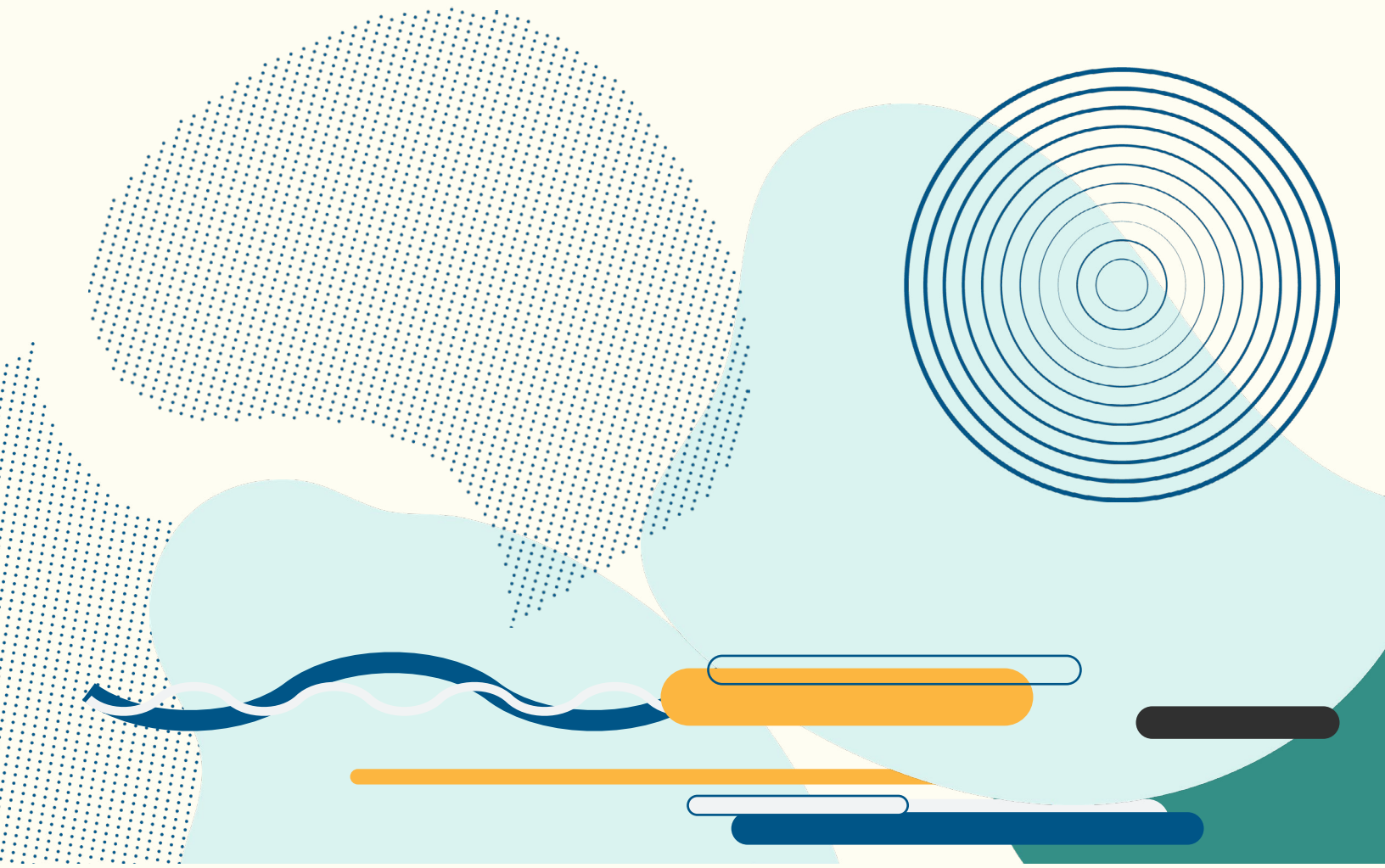

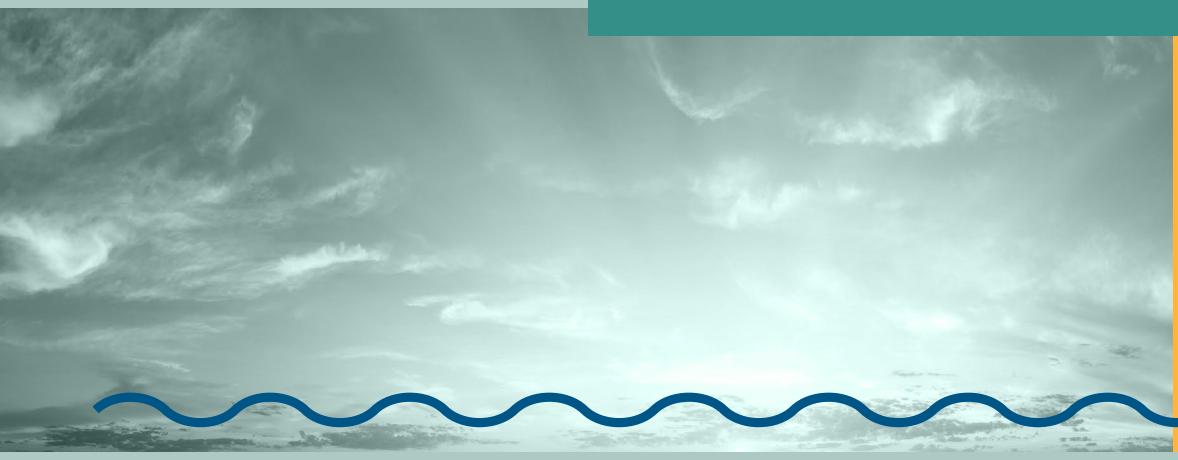

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