

Collaborating to Address Extreme Heat Equitably



Mission:

Our mission is to build power with frontline communities throughout Miami-Dade County to collectively advance justice and achieve shared prosperity.

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, Catalyst Miami has been working to address extreme heat and displacement due to climate gentrification in Miami-Dade County (MDC), Florida. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3.

Through their CCHE-funded activities, Catalyst Miami strengthened cross-sector collaboration to advance policies and programmatic solutions for extreme heat, health, and equity in MDC and the state of Florida. Prior to 2018, there were no plans or efforts at the county and city levels to address extreme heat, however Catalyst Miami's work in MDC led to increased awareness of the geographical impacts of extreme heat and disparities across urban heat islands. One of the most notable successes of Catalyst Miami's efforts was the appointment of Jane Gilbert as the MDC Chief Heat Officer (CHO), the first such position in the world. Through Catalyst Miami's partnerships and advocacy, they secured \$100,000 to initially fund the CHO position. The CHO has elevated residents' local heat and health concerns to state and national platforms and helped Catalyst Miami pursue new opportunities with federal stakeholders, including the National Weather Service (NWS). These opportunities were critical to Catalyst Miami's work, particularly given state policies that impede efforts to address extreme heat at the local level. The CHO developed an Extreme Heat Action Plan, which was informed by Catalyst Miami's community engagement efforts. Since the Extreme Heat Action Plan was published, there have been significant shifts and investments in raising awareness of extreme heat impacts and implementing solutions for heat safety.

Catalyst Miami made progress with (1) shifting the narrative around heat, health, and equity; (2) reducing harmful heat exposure in MDC's low and moderate-wealth communities and communities of color; (3) integrating the climate, health, and equity lens into MDC policies; and (4) expanding their base of advocates to include residents, healthcare professionals, academic institutions, and local government officials to create equity-centered policies.

In 2022, Mayor Daniella Levine Cava introduced the MDC budget which prioritized infrastructure and social services to build climate resilience. Catalyst Miami, in collaboration with Miami Climate Alliance, organized community members to defend budget allocations for extreme heat, tenant rights, infrastructure reforms, and other solutions for climate, health, and equity. The budget was approved as a result of their advocacy and community organizing efforts.

To date, Catalyst Miami has been focused on supporting MDC's goal to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 50% by 2030. Catalyst Miami's progress led to more people recognizing the connections between equity, urban heat islands, and energy burden. Additionally, Catalyst Miami is also helping other sectors understand ties between homelessness, housing affordability, and heat safety. As a result, Catalyst Miami has been increasingly engaged in the implementation of various heat and health solutions. For example, the Climate Ready Tech Hub called upon Catalyst Miami to lead a subcommittee for community engagement to ensure that technological solutions for heat were informed by communities and included considerations for health equity and environmental justice. For an overview of Catalyst Miami's CCHE-related work, see their [2022 CCHE theory of change \(slide 16\)](#), described in more detail below.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

Improved heat hazard communications by the NWS and response by MDC Office of Emergency Management. Catalyst Miami's collaboration with the NWS led to NWS' heat advisory threshold being lowered from 108°F to 105°F. With the lowered heat advisory threshold, there were major changes in discussions, resources, and awareness of extreme heat in MDC. Catalyst Miami co-hosted a tabletop exercise with MDC, NWS, and other national partners in 2023. This scenario-based exercise informed local emergency communications and addressed health hazards associated with energy insecurity.

Advocated for outdoor worker protections, including access to water, shaded recovery periods, and information about signs and symptoms of heat illness.

The launch of WeCount's Que Calor campaign contributed to community-informed heat protections for outdoor workers in Florida. WeCount mobilized over 200 outdoor workers to advocate for countywide heat standards. Unfortunately, the state of Florida passed a preemption which hindered county officials from approving outdoor worker protections in MDC. However, community engagement in the Que Calor campaign led to prioritized protections for outdoor workers in MDC's Extreme Heat Action Plan. Furthermore, Que Calor demonstrated the power of grassroots campaigning, particularly with agricultural workers, and the campaign became a model for other counties who want to advocate for similar protections for outdoor workers.

Integrated and incentivized wrap-around social services, weatherization, and energy efficiency in affordable housing. Through advocacy for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Catalyst Miami secured \$578,000 for weatherization assistance. Additionally, Catalyst Miami was asked to share feedback on the City of Miami's draft Heat Action Plan in Spring 2024 and provide guidance on how the City's plan could support wrap-around services and weatherization. Catalyst Miami is currently co-creating a community change grant with the EPA and other partners to support wrap-around services for weatherized homes, assess indoor air pollution, and implement small energy efficiency retrofits in public and affordable housing in South MDC. Through the Green Corridor Program, Catalyst Miami has helped 100 families reduce their energy bills with attic insulation, and the organization's efforts continue to focus on expanding services for home weatherization. The Community Action and Human Services Department often works with Catalyst Miami's Climate & Health Working Group to provide expertise and support community members' ideas for wrap-around solutions.

Advocated for cooling systems as a requirement in government-owned housing. Two MDC legislators introduced a bill requiring landlords across the state to provide functional air conditioning units in their properties. Catalyst Miami worked with their academic partners and organized citizen scientists to assess heat burden throughout MDC and the data overwhelmingly showed that people experienced indoor heat due to poorly constructed homes and financial barriers to using air conditioners. This research highlighted gaps in cooling solutions for residents and informed large-scale policies for residents. Catalyst Miami shifted the ways in which local government co-creates policy with communities. Staff from the MDC Chief Heat Office and Resilience Office engaged in Catalyst Miami's community outreach events to understand residents' perspectives. Most notably, Catalyst Miami and residents discussed heat impacts on people who are displaced and unhoused. As a result, MDC improved access to cooling centers for unhoused people.

Advanced affordable, accessible solar and energy efficiency programs. Catalyst Miami secured \$1.02M for utility bill assistance, and \$4M for resilience investments in existing affordable housing. This built off their previous efforts to address inequitable energy burden in MDC. Catalyst Miami's advocacy also led to greater community education on energy efficiency and high energy efficiency splitters were installed across MDC homes. Catalyst Miami participated in a metering campaign which led to 60,000 new solar installations in MDC. Approximately \$156M in funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was allocated to the Solar for All program, which distributed free solar installations for low and moderate-income households too. Catalyst Miami also secured \$100,000 to bring the Solar Energy Loan Fund program to MDC.

Supported state and local campaigns for just energy policy throughout the transition to 100% renewable energy. Catalyst Miami has been instrumental in advancing just energy policies as part of the transition to 100% renewable energy in MDC. By restructuring their organization around economic and climate justice pillars, Catalyst Miami has streamlined their advocacy efforts and ensured that their policy initiatives directly address the most pressing needs of local communities, including the energy burden among low-income residents, weatherization programs, tree canopy expansion, pollution-reduction strategies, and emphasizing clean solutions and

Select Resources and Media

- [Miami-Dade County Extreme Heat Action Plan](#)
- [Hyperlocal Observations Reveal Persistent Extreme Urban Heat in Southeast Florida](#)

community engagement in the MDC zero-waste master plan. Catalyst Miami's close partnerships with county officials helped them foster even more relationships with county departments that are tied to their climate justice work. Catalyst Miami intends to leverage these partnerships as they pursue state and local policy campaigns.

Improved enforcement capacity for neighborhood design standards. Catalyst Miami engaged with other grassroots organizations, including the Florida Housing Justice Alliance, the Hold the Line Coalition, Public Land for Public Good coalition, and Miami21 Zoning Code watchdog group. Through this coalition work, they monitored how local politicians spend funds for community resilience and green infrastructure and advocated against further urban expansion into water systems and protected natural areas by private developments. Catalyst Miami advocated for heat exposure protections for public transit riders and green spaces in neighborhoods.

Built knowledge among health professionals about how social and climate justice issues impact health. In June 2021, Catalyst Miami launched the Climate & Health Working Group through the Miami Climate Alliance. The Climate & Health Working Group included university healthcare partners and health advocacy organizations (e.g., Florida Atlantic University, University of Miami, Florida Voices for Health, and Florida Medicaid Expansion Coalition). Before publishing the Extreme Heat Action Plan, the CHO engaged with Catalyst Miami's Climate & Health Working Group in the review process. Catalyst Miami, CLEO Institute, and Florida Clinicians for Climate Action provided actionable feedback on affordable housing retrofits, cooling center services, community emergency response trainings, and community engagement components of the Plan. Florida Clinicians for Climate Action, and specifically Dr. Cheryl Holder, contributed to educational and outreach efforts to change how healthcare professionals and medical students understood heat stress and heat exhaustion. Dr. Holder and her colleagues developed resources for healthcare professionals to educate their patients on tenant protections and workplace protections that ensure their access to air conditioning and other heat safety resources. Catalyst Miami also collaborated with the Department of Emergency Management to inform educational training programs and emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts for extreme heat. In 2021, Catalyst Miami also launched its first cohort of Leaders in Grassroots Health Transformation (LIGHT), a grassroots leadership training program on health advocacy. In 2022, Catalyst Miami launched two LIGHT cohorts.

Gathered and used community data to inform a policy agenda. Catalyst Miami used an environmental assessment tool to engage residents affected by extreme heat and partnered with academic institutions to conduct research that informed their policy agenda. They also included residents in implementation assessments for local policy and programmatic solutions for extreme heat. For example, in Summer 2024, Catalyst Miami surveyed residents to evaluate the Parks Department's efforts to grow the urban tree canopy in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by extreme heat. Catalyst Miami has also partnered with the CHO to identify opportunities to use healthcare data from emergency departments and local urgent care clinics to better understand how people suffered from heat stress, heat strokes, and heat exhaustion. This data will inform healthcare-related solutions for extreme heat.

Expanded the Miami Climate & Health Equity Coalition (MCHEC) into a fully-fledged organizing table. In November 2021, the CHO launched the MDC Climate & Heat Task Force in partnership with the Miami Foundation. Prior to the launch, Catalyst Miami designed the format of task force meetings and shifted to an open meeting structure. Under this new format, the general public was invited to attend meetings and could provide feedback on extreme heat challenges related to emergency management, workers, housing, and tree canopy.

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **Be creative and intersectional with partnerships.** Over time, Catalyst Miami learned to foster and strengthen partnerships in various sectors. Since heat, health, climate change, and equity are intersectional, Catalyst Miami recognized the value of cross-sectoral partnerships to advance their work.
- **Understand how residents' daily lives are impacted by issues at the intersection of climate change, health, and equity.** Through their work, Catalyst Miami gained a clearer understanding of how different barriers impact residents' heat safety. For example, Catalyst Miami distributed air conditions to heat burdened homes and realized that some residents could not afford the utility costs to use the air conditioners which informed Catalyst Miami's wrap-around, multi-benefit solutions for residents.
- **Speak about the work in a way that connects with the people.** Catalyst Miami shares real stories about the challenges folks face, like how soaring energy bills can force tough choices between basic needs. They believe resilience isn't just about sturdy buildings; it's also about fair wages, reliable transit, and ensuring everyone has access to safe and affordable housing. By

focusing on personal experiences rather than just numbers, Catalyst Miami aims to connect with the community and show how their efforts make a real difference in their lives.

- **State legislation and utility companies have impacted Catalyst Miami's policy advocacy efforts.** Catalyst Miami has engaged cross-sector partners and residents in developing heat and health solutions at the local level. However, the state legislature used preemption to reverse or prevent new, local legislation for extreme heat in MDC. Florida Power & Light, a utility company, has regularly opposed progressive legislators and contributed to preemption legislation that would restrict solar energy and GHG regulations.

Looking Ahead

Catalyst Miami continues to seek more opportunities for participatory democracy. They have action plans developed but want to ensure community members can hold county and city officials accountable for implementing solutions that lead to visible improvements in frontline communities. Catalyst Miami wants residents to be part of policy conversations and assessments so that local officials understand how residents are impacted by the Extreme Heat Action Plan. Catalyst Miami and coalition partners, as well as NWS, are pursuing a heat season moratorium so that residents can use their air conditioners during the hottest days of the year, without being burdened by additional utility costs. Given the state preemption that hindered MDC from approving heat protection ordinances for outdoor workers, Catalyst Miami will continue to build their base of supporters and use creative strategies to circumnavigate preemption in order to address issues related to heat, health, equity, and housing.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
CLEO Institute	Institutional Partner
Community Health of South Florida	Health Partner
Debris Free Ocean	Community Partner
Engage	Community Partner
FIU Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine	Academic Partner
FIU Neighborhood HELP	Community Partner
FIU Sea Level Solutions Center	Academic Partner
Florida Atlantic University	Academic Partner
Florida Clinicians for Climate Action	Health Partner
Florida Medicaid Expansion Coalition	Health Partner
Florida Rising	Community Partner
Florida Voices for Health	Community Partner
Miami Foundation	Community Partner
Miami Climate Alliance	Community Partner
Miami Workers Center	Community Partner
Miami-Dade County	Government Partner
Sierra Club	Institutional Partner

Organization	Type
Sustain the Culture	Community Partner
University of Miami	Academic Partner
WeCount	Community Partner