THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MEL & ENID ZUCKERMAN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALT
Southwest Center on Resilience for Climate Change & Health

Webinar

Rural and Tribal Heat Listening Session Findings

August 28, 2026

Housekeeping

- The presentation section (only) of this webinar will be recorded.
- AI notetakers are not permitted due to privacy concerns.
- We will share webinar slides and presentation recording with all registrants after the session.
- Please introduce yourself in the chat:
  - Name, affiliation
- Quick attendee poll

Southwest Center on Resilience for Climate and Health (SCORCH)

MISSION

Improving health equity in arid lands across the lifespan by enhancing existing community partnerships and supporting adaptation efforts by indigenous, Latino, low resource urban and rural communities in the southwestern United States and globally.

Session Goals

By the end of the webinar, participants will be able to:

- Review key findings from the rural and Tribal heat listening sessions.
- Identify challenges, current responses, and priorities for heat preparedness.
- Explore community-informed recommendations to reduce heat-related health risks.
- Discuss opportunities for collaboration and next steps across Arizona.

Acknowledgements

We thank all individuals who participated in our listening sessions.

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Arizona Heat Is Not One Story

How heat exposure and heat relief differ by location

Rural Communities

- Extreme heat temperatures vary from shorter episodic summer heat to chronic year-around heat
- Homes not built for prolonged heat
- Transportation barriers to cooling cooling centers
- Risk is amplified by geography
- Data gaps and sparse representation in statewide heat convenings.

Urban Communities

- Hotter, longer-duration summer season with severe urban heat island effect
- Predominantly built surfaces with significant heat retention
- Warmer nights with reduced nocturnal cooling
- Formal heat-relief infrastructure that is unevenly accessible
- More robust heat surveillance and health data

Heat risk depends on various factors including individual health, duration of high temperatures, access to shade, effective cooling, and heat relief.

Source: Boyer et al., 2025; listening session findings

The Extreme Heat Crisis in Arizona

Summary Report of Heat-Related Illness (HRI) Cases in 2025

Emergency Department Visits	Inpatient Admissions (Hospitalizations)
Total number of heat-related illness emergency department visits in Arizona during 2025 is **4,273**.	Total number of heat-related illness inpatient admissions in Arizona during 2025 is **1,215**.
The rate of ED visits among Arizona residents per 100,000 population is highest in La Paz, Mohave and Yuma counties.	The rate of hospitalizations among Arizona residents per 100,000 population is highest in Mohave, Gila, and Maricopa counties.

Source: ADHS

The Extreme Heat Crisis in Arizona

Figure 2: Heat-Related Illness ED Visit Rates per 10,000 ED Visits by Arizona County, 2024

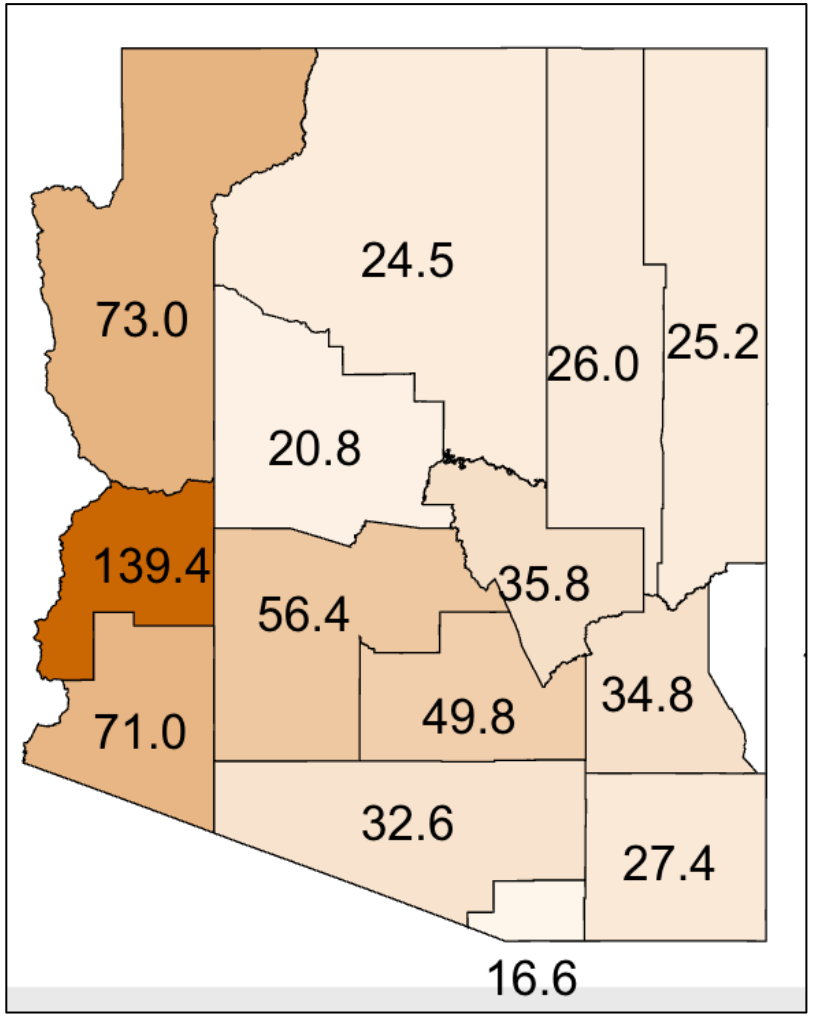
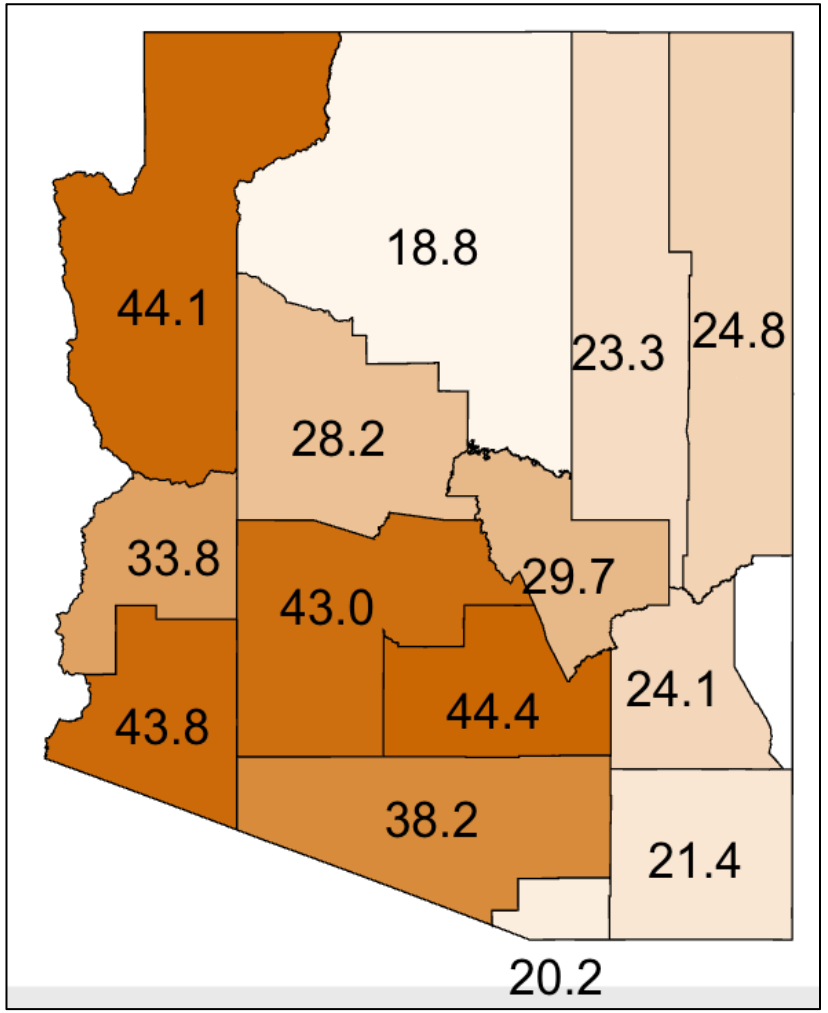


Figure 3: Heat-Related Illness ED Visit Rates per 10,000 ED Visits by Arizona County, 2025



Source: ADHS

Purpose of the Listening Sessions

- Discuss experiences, challenges, and strategies to building resilience to extreme heat
- Identify action items and opportunities to collaborate
- Exchange ideas and solutions that are helpful
- Ensure rural and Tribal community voices are present in statewide extreme heat efforts

1. Summer /Fall 2025 — Listening Sessions
2. Spring 2026 — Data Review and Analysis
3. Spring 2026 — Submit Draft Findings to ADHS
4. Summer 2026 — Webinar

Methods

Approach

- ✓ Five in-person listening sessions (Aug–Nov 2025)
- ✓ Conducted across rural Arizona communities
- ✓ Participants recruited through regional partners
- ✓ Sessions were not recorded

Session Format

- ✓ Small groups (4–7)
- ✓ Facilitated discussions
- ✓ 4 modules with guided prompts for discussion on heat impacts, current heat relief efforts, and partnerships

Data Collection

- ✓ Pre-event survey forms
- ✓ Sign-in sheets
- ✓ Facilitator notes (de-identified)

Analysis

- ✓ Notes analyzed using MAXQDA qualitative software
- ✓ Findings synthesized across all session sites
- ✓ Thematic analysis identified 13 major themes across sites

Who We Heard From

90
Total Participants

64
Organizations Represented

11
Organization Types

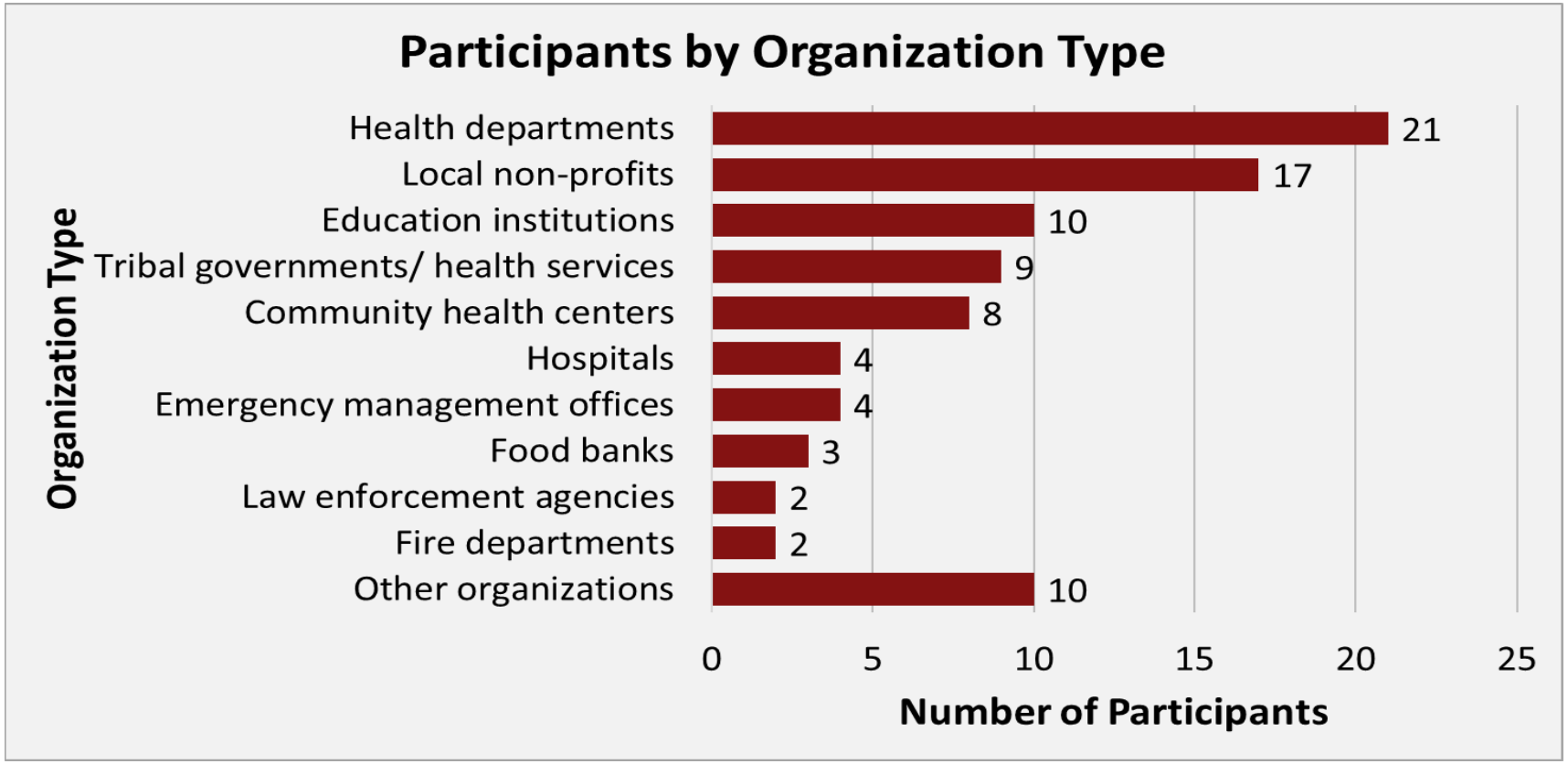


Figure 4: Listening session participants by organization type.

TOP 5 CODED THEMES

1

Resources

Availability and limitations of personnel, supplies, and other materials needed for heat response.

2

Information Sharing

Communication efforts concerning heat risks, recommended actions, and available resources.

3

Opportunities

Ideas and recommendations for new heat relief or preparedness strategies.

4

Relief

Actions currently being taken to provide relief from extreme heat.

5

Access

Issues related to accessing and utilizing available facilities or resources to stay cool

Rural Heat Impacts Across Sites

Shared heat challenges emerged across sessions, but participants described distinct local impacts and concerns.

Somerton

- Farmworker exposure
- Dangerously hot mobile homes,
- High utility costs,
- Challenges with safe food and medication storage.

*"Don't recognize the signs and need to finish for the day…*they continue working, then call again for help later.*"*

Parker

- Desert rescues involving people visiting the area
- Concerns for dialysis patients and others with chronic conditions.

"Desert rescues are high in [County], especially for people passing through the area during extreme heat."

Benson

- Limited water for evaporative cooling in isolated communities
- Outdoor workers could not always shift schedules to avoid the heat.

"[Community] is small and isolated, no water to run those swamp coolers (most people have these)."

Sedona

- People arriving unprepared or underestimating heat conditions when hiking or doing other outdoor recreation activities

"People going hiking that don't understand the heat and end up going to the ED...Tourism is a factor in the increasing heat-related ED/hospital trends."

ADHS Heat Summit (Tribal-focused)

- Water hauling,
- Limited electricity and cooling appliances,
- Unreliable power, and long distances to services

"A large need for ice - limited electricity or water access, appliances (AC, swamp coolers, fridge), shared appliances."

4 KEY CHALLENGES

1. Funding Limitations
2. Gaps in Communication & Awareness
3. Access Barriers to Cooling Resources
4. Limited Localized Data to Guide Heat Response

Key Challenges: Funding Limitations

Heat response efforts are constrained by limited, inconsistent funding and reliance on volunteer capacity.

Participant Voices

"[Organization] reaches out to people, has lists… but the funding changes and is very hit or miss."

"Assistance programs have strict eligibility criteria and very limited funding."

"A lot of cooling centers in [the county] are 100% volunteer driven. People are doing and driving the work."

Key Challenges: Gaps in Communication & Awareness

Communities face challenges reaching residents with timely and relevant heat information due to limited communication infrastructure, communication barriers, and varying perceptions of heat risk.

Participant Voices

"[Community] is no longer doing them in Spanish and need[s] to start again…[to be] culturally accurate…"

"Drink water, stay cool. Those words have been told to us the entire time; they don't mean anything. How do we shift and make people care?"

"Too much a mentality of 'if you grow up here, you never think about it, it's just hot, it's not a big deal'. Need to make people think, this is really an issue."

Key Challenges: Access Barriers to Cooling Resources

Geographic & Transportation Barriers: Long distances, dispersed populations, limited public transportation, and high transportation costs make cooling locations difficult to reach.

Limited Availability & Capacity: Cooling centers may be unavailable in some communities or have limited hours, staffing, and other resources.

Accessibility & Comfort
Pet restrictions and concerns about whether spaces feel safe or welcoming discourage residents from using available cooling centers.

Participant Voices

"Many cooling centers are volunteering, don't accept pets – people don't go there"

"Transportation barriers (few services, high taxi costs $40-$50 one way)."

"[Community] is geographically separated from urban cities; high cost of transporting resources."

Key Challenges Identified: Limited Localized Data to Guide Heat Response

Limited community-level data: Participants identified a need for more localized information on temperatures, hospitalizations, vulnerable populations, household cooling access, and other community-specific heat risks.

Limited data on heat-relief services: There is a need for more information on who is using cooling centers and hydration stations, where services are being used, and where unmet needs remain.

Data gaps affect planning and resources: Limited local data make it harder to identify priorities, guide resource allocation, demonstrate community needs, and support funding opportunities.

Participant Voices

"We are not digging into this; heat has not been a focus; we don't have a system in the ER that helps indicate that they are seeing high numbers of HRI."

"If we have better data, that would inform better funding opportunities…Need to do better job of tracking to get on people's radar more."

"Lots of confusion on what is hot? What is heatwave? We need to know so we can send info with kids."

How Communities are Responding

1 Adapting Existing Community Assets

Using locally available spaces such as libraries, senior centers, fire departments, churches, casinos, and community centers as cooling centers.

2 Bringing Resources Directly to Residents

Delivering water and hydration support and utilizing CHWs/CHRs to check on older adults and residents who may be isolated or unable to travel.

3 Relying on Community Networks

Neighbors and local organizations support heat relief efforts by offering rides, distributing supplies, and sharing information.

4 Using Trusted, Locally Available Communication

CHWs/CHRs, radio, schools, and other established local networks help reach residents where internet or cell coverage may be limited.

Responses vary across communities; there is no single approach that fits every community.

Recommendations for Rural & Tribal Heat Resilience

Submitted to ADHS to inform the 2026 Arizona State Heat Plan

1 Prioritize Rural & Tribal Areas with Flexible Long-Term Funding

Expand transportation to cooling centers · Reduce restrictive eligibility requirements · Adequately compensate community health workers

2 Co-Develop Localized Data Management Systems

Establish standardized local-level heat surveillance · Improve death certificate coding · Give communities a voice in how data are presented

3 Formalize Tribal Data Sovereignty

Intergovernmental data-sharing agreements with Tribal nations · Ensure communities receive data in culturally appropriate ways

Recommendations for Rural & Tribal Heat Resilience (continued)

Submitted to ADHS to inform the 2026 Arizona State Heat Plan

4 Establish Clear, Actionable Heat Guidance

Clear temperature thresholds for heat alerts · Standardized advisory templates and protocols · Sample heat messaging for communities

5 Use Multi-Channel, Culturally Appropriate Outreach

Combine radio, flyers, phone trees, and door-to-door with digital tools · Reach people who don't have internet or smartphones

6 Coordinate & Empower Communities through Rural & Tribal Heat Policies

Integrate heat into core public health programs · Regular pre-season planning meetings · Update infrastructure standards and building codes

Breakout Group Discussions Directions

- Please identify/select the breakout room by region that you wish to join:
  - Room 1 – Central [Gila, Maricopa, Pinal]
  - Room 2 – Northern/Western [Apache, Coconino, Navajo, Yavapai, La Paz, Mohave, Yuma]
  - Room 3 – Southern (1) [Cochise, Graham, Greenlee, Pima, Santa Cruz]
  - Room 4 – Southern (2) [Cochise, Graham, Greenlee, Pima, Santa Cruz]
- Duration: 20 minutes

Breakout Room Discussion Questions

- What part of these findings feel relevant to your community/work right now?
- What message should decision-makers hear from this?
- What is one support (e.g., tool, partnership, resource) that would help you respond effectively?

Arizona Rural Heat Listening Session Reports

- Parker
- Benson
- Somerton
- Tribal & Rural
- Sedona

PARKER RURAL HEAT LISTENING SESSION REPORT

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA MEL & ENID ZUCKERMAN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Southwest Center on Resilience for Climate & Health

Key Takeaways

Local organizations and community partners are already playing an important role in supporting residents during extreme heat. Participants described active efforts including cooling centers, water distribution on Tribal lands, and wellness checks for Elders and other vulnerable residents during power outages.

Heat information is shared through several channels, but gaps remain in reaching all residents. Heat alerts and safety information are shared through radio, Facebook, flyers, and community networks. However, residents without smartphones or reliable internet access may miss updates, and there is no consistent, accessible alert system that reaches everyone.

Infrastructure and access challenges increase vulnerability during extreme heat events. Participants described barriers including transportation, aging power infrastructure prone to outages, and limited local capacity to repair electrical failures quickly during extreme heat conditions.

Participants described that Tribes feel protective and tend to operate independently, creating coordination gaps that can leave community members without support. Resources shared through Tribal channels are often assumed by non-Tribal community members to be unavailable to them, and there is a noted need for greater collaboration between Tribal and non-Tribal systems.

Participants expressed interest in stronger coordination and planning across organizations. Opportunities identified include establishing clearer heat response trigger points, improving communication between Tribal and non-Tribal systems, and convening partners before the start of the heat season.

Session Overview

The Parker Rural Heat Listening Session took place on Wednesday, August 20, 2025, at the Parker Walk-in Clinic. The session was conducted by the ***Southwest Center on Resilience for Climate and Health (SCORCH)****, in collaboration with the* ***Regional Center for Border Health, Inc.****, the* ***Arizona Center for Rural Health,*** *and the* ***Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS)****. The session included 12 participants across 3 discussion groups, each facilitated and documented by a SCORCH team member. Participants represented community health centers, an emergency management office, a hospital, local non-profits , and Tribal government/ health services. Unless otherwise noted, information in this summary reflects the perspectives of both Tribal and non-Tribal community members in and around Parker, Arizona, in La Paz County.*

Suggested citation: Chin S, Block Ngaybe M, Tucker K, Garn A, Arora M. Parker Rural Heat Listening Session Summary. (2026) University of Arizona Southwest Center on Resilience Climate and Health.

https://scorch.arizona.edu/arizona-regional-heat-preparedness

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Boyer, A.-L., Ahn, M., Keith, L., & Brown, H. E. (2025). Striving for rural heat resilience: A systematic literature review. *Weather, Climate, and Society*, *18*(1), 17–31. https://doi.org/10.1175/wcas-d-25-0047.1

Thank you!