

The Doha Declaration on Climate, Health & Wellbeing

HEALTH MUST BE CENTRAL TO CLIMATE ACTION

COP18, December 2012

Health and medical organisations from around the world are calling for the protection and promotion of health to be made the one of the central priorities of global and national policy responses to climate change.

The protection of health and welfare is one of the central rationales for reducing emissions in Article One of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Article Four requires all countries to consider the health implications of climate adaptation and mitigation. Yet health is being overlooked in the development of responses to climate change, and its importance undervalued by policymakers, business and the media.

Human health and wellbeing is a basic human right and contributes to economic and social development. It is fundamentally dependent on stable, functioning ecosystems and a healthy biosphere. These foundations for health are at risk from climate change and ecological degradation.

Health as a driver for mitigation and adaptation

The impact of climate change on health is one of the most significant measures of harm associated with our warming planet. Protecting health is therefore one of the most important motivations for climate action.

Climate change is affecting human health in multiple ways: both direct – through extreme weather events, food and water insecurity and infectious diseases – and indirect – through economic instability, migration and as a driver of conflict.

The risks to health from climate change are very large and will affect all populations, but particularly children, women and poorer people and those in developing nations. Urgent and sustained emissions reductions as well as effective adaptation are needed.

Climate action can deliver many benefits to health worldwide. Reducing fossil fuel consumption simultaneously improves air quality and improves public health. Shifting to cleaner, safer, low carbon energy systems will save millions of lives each year. Moving to more active lifestyles and expansion of and access to public transport systems can improve health through increased physical activity and reduced air pollution. Improving insulation in homes and buildings can protect people from extreme temperatures and reduce energy consumption. All of these changes will provide significant economic savings. Climate action that recognises these benefits can improve the health of individuals and communities, support resilient and sustainable development, and improve global equity.

What we seek from climate action

Recognising health in all policies and strengthening health systems globally can advance human rights and help create safe, resilient, adaptable, and sustainable communities.

We call for:

1. The health impacts of climate change to be taken into account domestically and globally

- Health impacts and co-benefits to be fully evaluated, costed and reflected in all domestic, regional and global climate decisions on both mitigation and adaptation;
- Health and environmental costs to be reflected in corporate and national accounts;
- Assessment of loss and damage from climate change to include impacts on human health, wellbeing and community resilience, as well as impacts to health care infrastructure and systems;

2. Investment in climate mitigation and adaptation to be significantly increased on a rapid timescale

- Priority given to decarbonisation of national and global energy supplies;
- Cessation of fossil fuel subsidies globally and greater funding for renewable and clean technologies;
- Funding for programs to support and protect health in vulnerable countries to be significantly increased;
- Investment in adaptation and mitigation programs that can demonstrate health benefits to be substantially increased;

3. The health sector and the community to be engaged and informed on climate action

- The health sector to be engaged and included in the processes of designing and leading climate mitigation and adaptation worldwide;
- National and global education programs to increase public awareness of the health effects of climate change and promote the health co-benefits of low carbon pathways; and
- More inclusive consultation processes in global climate negotiations to reflect the views of young people, women and indigenous people.

Our Future

Human health is profoundly threatened by our global failure to halt emissions growth and curb climate change. As representatives of health communities around the world, we argue that strategies to achieve rapid and sustained emissions reductions and protect health must be implemented in a time frame to avert further loss and damage.

We recognise that this will require exceptional courage and leadership from our political, business and civil society leaders, including the health sector; acceptance from the global community about the threats to health posed by our current path; and a willingness to act to realise the many benefits of creating low carbon, healthy, sustainable and resilient societies.

'You cannot tackle hunger, disease, and poverty unless you can also provide people with a healthy ecosystem'

- Gro Harlem Brundtland

Signatories to the Doha Declaration on Climate, Health & Wellbeing

World Medical Association (WMA)
International Council of Nurses
European Public Health Alliance
Climate and Health Alliance, Australia
Health and Environment Alliance (Europe)
Health Care Without Harm
Climate and Health Council (UK)
C3 Collaborating for Health
NHS Sustainable Development Unit (SDU)
International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA)
OraTaiao: The NZ Climate & Health Council
The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare
The Humanitarian Centre
Healthy Planet (UK)

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