

## Climate change and health – engaging the health community

*Up to now, the polar bear has been the poster child for climate change. We need to use every politically correct and scientifically sound trick in the book to convince the world that humanity really is the most important species endangered by climate change. This century, climate change - a fifth horseman, a new threat of a magnitude unknown to human experience - will ride across our promising landscape of public health. It will ride on a collision course with all the fits and starts of our progress, sometimes fragile, sometimes fundamental."*

Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General

### Background

On 22 January 2009 the World Health Organisation (WHO) Executive Board endorsed a far reaching work plan on climate change and health.<sup>1</sup>

On 28-29 April 2009, representatives from health and environment ministries from the 53 countries in the WHO European region discussed the European roadmap for work contained in the draft Ministerial Declaration:

1. *We, the Ministers of Health and Environment of WHO's Member States in the European Region and representatives of partner organizations, share a commitment to protecting health and promoting health equity, health security and healthy environments in a changing climate. We will:*
  - i. *ensure that all current and future climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, policies and strategies include health issues at all levels;*
  - ii. *strengthen health systems to cope with the impacts of climate change on human health and security and to derive health co-benefits from measures and policies, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups and, if appropriate, subregions;*
  - iii. *raise awareness to encourage healthy mitigation and adaptation policies in all sectors;*
  - iv. *increase the health sector's contribution to ensuring energy- and resource-efficient management that will result in decreased greenhouse gas emissions and financial and adaptation benefits.*

**Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWHE) and Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) are working together to ensure health considerations and benefits are central to climate change discussions. We also seek to ensure the European Union achieves its objective of stopping climate change and keeping global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius.**

Here are three ways you can get involved:

### **1. KEEP UP TO DATE AND SHARE INFORMATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH POLICY DEVELOPMENTS**

In an effort to raise debate and empower the health and environment community on approaches to and synergies between climate protection and health promotion, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) launched a dedicated list serve on "**Climate Change and Health**". Sign up on our website at: <http://www.env-health.org/a/2599>

<sup>1</sup> Work plan on Climate change and Health, Document EB124/11, 20 November 2008. Endorsed by the WHO Executive Board in resolution Document EB124.R5, 22 January 2009.

## **2. JOIN OUR ADVOCACY EFFORTS TO PUT HEALTH AT CENTER OF COPENHAGEN NEGOTIATIONS**

In the run-up to the UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen in December 2009, HEAL and HCWH will work to build up capacity and advocacy for the health community in the EU to engage more proactively for a positive outcome for public health. Our key messages:

1. Ensure that health is given central consideration in climate change discussions, instead of the current marginalised position, as advocated by WHO.
2. Increase public health benefits of climate change action by encouraging the EU to maintain its leadership role in climate change negotiations by making sure the EU commits to at least 30% domestic greenhouse gas emissions reductions by 2020, compared to 1990 emission levels.
3. Ensure that the EU is committed to assisting efforts to fight climate change in the EU and externally by securing accessible funding mechanisms. These should be dedicated to helping improvements in the health sector's efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change; support programmes that help protect public health from climate change; assist the most affected and vulnerable communities around the world fight and cope with climate change.

## **3. READ OUR RESOURCES:**

### ***'The benefits to Health of a Strong Climate change policy'<sup>2</sup>:***

This recent HEAL report, co-published with the leading climate change advocates, illustrates how massive health benefits can be reaped from strong climate change action

It estimates that, in terms of health improvements, the *'additional co-benefits in the year 2020 of better air quality due to reaching a 30% cut in greenhouse gas emissions would include: 105,000 reduction in life years lost; 5,300 fewer cases of chronic bronchitis; 2,800 less hospital admissions.'* It also shows that: *'While the health benefits in economic terms from achieving the 20% target are substantial (between 13 and 52 billion Euros), raising the target to 30% is estimated to increase them by 48% to between 20 and 76 billion Euros in the year 2020 alone. Additional benefits compared to the EC proposal are between 6.5 and 25 billion Euros. These benefits would accrue year on year.'*

### ***'Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Planet, Healthy People: Addressing climate change in health care settings'<sup>3</sup>***

This draft discussion paper published by WHO and HCWH shows how the health care sector can lead the way against climate change and showcases snapshots of work being done by hospitals in over 15 countries around the world to improve energy efficiency and adopt greener approaches to its services, so as to reduce its climate footprint.

For more information or if you would like to support us, please contact:

Dr. Pendo Maro

Health Care Without Harm Europe; Health and Environment Alliance; Postal Address: Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

28 Boulevard Charlemagne, B-1000 Brussels

Tel.: + 32 2234 3647 Fax : + 32 2234 3649 Mobile : +32 495 281 494

**Emails : [pendo.maro@hcwh.org](mailto:pendo.maro@hcwh.org); [pendo@env-health.org](mailto:pendo@env-health.org)**

Websites: [www.noharm.org/Europe](http://www.noharm.org/Europe) [www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org).

<sup>2</sup> Climate Action Network Europe, Health and Environment Alliance, WWF. 2008: [http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits\\_to\\_health\\_report\\_-september\\_2008.pdf](http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits_to_health_report_-september_2008.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.noharm.org/details.cfm?ID=2199&type=document>