

# Protecting Public Health From Climate Change – A Global Call to Action

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*Launched in Durban, South Africa-- December 4, 2011*

We know that, according to *The Lancet*, climate change is the greatest global health threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

As leading healthcare providers, professionals and organizations, we know that the health impacts of climate change, such as the spread of vector-borne diseases, and the consequences of heat waves, droughts and extreme weather events are already being felt around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where more people die as a consequence of climate change than anywhere else.

We are profoundly concerned that as greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise unabated, dangerous climate change will magnify existing health crises, deepening and broadening the global burden of disease. This will in turn raise health care costs worldwide, while undermining and overwhelming public health infrastructure everywhere. The overwhelming burden will fall on the most vulnerable -- those living in poor countries, who have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions.

We also know that what is good for the climate is good for health, and that an equitable resolution to climate change will result in major health benefits worldwide.

Given the gravity and urgency of the situation—and the opportunity to promote public health by addressing climate change—we call on our colleagues in public health organizations, health professional associations, hospitals, health systems and ministries of health around the world to endorse this Call to Action and take concerted action.

**Having convened at the first Global Climate and Health Summit in Durban, South Africa, we hereby commit to:**

1. **Provide Leadership:** As representatives of our organizations, we will drive the agenda for climate and health, promoting this Call to Action throughout the world.
2. **Engage and Inform:** We will engage and inform our constituencies of millions of doctors, nurses, public health workers, hospitals, health systems and health policy makers about the health risks from climate change, and the health benefits of climate action. As health professionals, we will also serve as messengers to our patients, our communities and our governments about the major health impacts of climate change and the steps they can take to reverse their impact.
3. **Mitigate:** We will lead by example and reduce the carbon footprint of our own institutions, practice and activities. We will strive to make our hospitals greener and healthier by reducing waste, investing in energy efficiency and clean energy sources, while promoting sustainable transport and resource consumption. By doing so, we commit to demonstrating how our societies can move toward carbon neutrality.

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<sup>1</sup> “Managing the Health Effects of Climate Change” *The Lancet*, Volume 373, Issue 9676, Pages 1693 - 1733, 16 May 2009.

4. **Adapt:** We will strive to make our health systems more resilient and capable of withstanding and responding to the human toll of natural disasters and the shifting burden of disease.
5. **Advocate Locally and Nationally:** We will work within our countries to advocate for emissions reductions and/or low-carbon development strategies that promote both a healthy climate and public health. We will call for solutions that reduce the local health impacts of fossil fuels; solutions that foster clean energy and social justice; solutions that save lives and money while protecting public health from climate change.
6. **Advocate Globally:** We will advocate for a fair and binding global agreement, as articulated in the Durban Declaration on Climate and Health, that:
  - Places the protection of human health as a primary objective of any agreement.
  - Establishes an ambitious fair shares framework to reduce global emissions (based on the principles of Equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities) in order to avoid a global public health disaster.
  - Fosters both energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy that protects public health by reducing both local and global pollution.
  - Provides the immediate necessary resources to operationalize the Green Fund, and in the longer term, appropriate mitigation and adaptation funding required to address the health impacts of climate change, assuring all countries' Rights to Sustainable Development and their ability to pursue a low carbon development pathway.

***The matter is urgent. The health of the world's population is at risk. The time for action is now.***

Climate and Health Alliance, Australia

Climate and Health Council, United Kingdom

Democratic Nurses Association of South Africa

Doctors for Human Kind Foundation, Nigeria

FHI360

Haley's Health Initiative, South Africa

Health Care Without Harm

Health and Environment Alliance, Europe

Hospice Palliative Care Association, South Africa

International Council of Nurses

International Federation of Medical Students Associations

Irish Doctors' Environmental Association

KwaZulu Natal Provincial Research Forum, South Africa

Maromi Health Research, South Africa

People's Health Movement, South Africa

Plurimedia, Mozambique

The Pollution Research Group, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Projeto Hospitais Saudáveis, Brazil

Public Health Institute, US

Sustainable Enterprise for Enabling Development (SEED) Trust

SDECA (Merebank), South Africa

Sidala Ecology Solutions, South Africa

The South African Medical Association

South Africa Institute of Environmental Health

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, South Africa

WEMOS

Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Initiative, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

World Federation of Public Health Associations

World Medical Association

World Vision