

## Protecting health from climate change



World Health Organization



WHO/Hans Everts

## WHO Global Programme on Climate Change & Health

### WHO's actions on climate and health

WHO is committed to work with Member States and other partners, to protect and promote health in response to the threat of climate change.

### Why climate change matters to health

- ◆ Besides environmental and economic damage, the ultimate impact of climate change is a toll on our most precious resource - human lives and health.
- ◆ The responsibility for protecting lives and wellbeing ultimately falls on the health sector. Investing in health protection and adaptation can save lives now and increase resilience to climate change.
- ◆ Well-designed mitigation policies in sectors such as energy and transport, can bring large and immediate co-benefits for public health.
- ◆ Health sector activities and infrastructure are energy intensive. Reducing their environmental footprint can play an important role in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions.

### What WHO is doing

WHO Member States committed to address the health implications of climate change at the 2008 World Health Assembly. At their request, WHO brought together its activities on climate change in a global workplan with four main objectives:

#### *Advocating and raise awareness*

A better understanding of the links between climate change and health can help motivate behavioural change, and public support, for mitigation and adaptation. WHO is raising awareness of climate links to health through advocacy campaigns, publications, multimedia products and policy briefings, and supporting participation of health actors in key climate forums, to strengthen climate and health policy.

#### *Strengthening partnerships*

WHO leads the health component of the UN system-wide response to climate change. This includes representing health in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, co-ordinating networks of climate negotiators, public health actors and scientists, and convening intersectoral policy mechanisms at the national level.

#### *Enhancing scientific evidence*

WHO works with leading experts and institutions worldwide to improve the understanding and evidence base of the linkages of health and climate, the disease burden and health costs attributable to climate change, and effective interventions to protect and promote health through both adaptation and mitigation.

#### *Strengthening health systems*

WHO applies its country presence, policy and technical capacity to support member states to strengthen the climate resilience of health systems and communities. This includes building capacity to assess, address, and monitor health risks from climate change, and implementing health adaptation projects in all WHO regions.



**WHO has an active and long-standing programme on protecting health from climate change, guided by a World Health Assembly resolution.**

Through its country, regional and headquarters offices, WHO leads the health component of the overall UN response to this global challenge. WHO provides policy and technical guidance, and programme support, to strengthen the health system response to climate change, and to ensure that health is considered in decisions made by other sectors, such as energy and transport.



### Achievements so far

- ◆ Mobilization of commitment by 193 Member States, resulting in 2008 World Health Assembly Resolution on climate change and health, backed by Regional Frameworks for Action.
- ◆ Representation of the health sector within the global climate change negotiations, the UN system-wide response to climate change, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- ◆ Over 50 books and reports assessing health implications of climate change, and describing the necessary responses, at global and regional level.
- ◆ Definition of an applied global research agenda on health protection from climate change, and development of partnerships between end-users, researchers, and donors.
- ◆ Production of technical guidance on health vulnerability and adaptation assessment, and on specific climate-related risks, such as heatwaves, floods, and vector-borne diseases.
- ◆ Workshops to raise awareness, foster intersectoral collaboration, and plan responses, covering over 50 countries.
- ◆ Implementation of major projects to pilot adaptation to climate change in 14 countries in all six WHO regions, and support for assessments of health vulnerability and adaptation to climate change in over 30 countries.

### WHO programme goals for the future

- ◆ Health perspective and expertise fully represented in international climate policy and support mechanisms.
- ◆ Comprehensive programme of policy, technical and capacity-building support for national health and climate planning.
- ◆ Health adaptation plans designed and implemented across WHO Member States.
- ◆ Health assessments established as a criteria for choosing mitigation policies.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

The climate change that has occurred since the 1970s already causes over 140 000 excess deaths each year.

Climate change is estimated to add at least US\$2-4 billion in annual health sector costs by 2030. International funding for health adaptation is less than 1% of this figure.

Over 95% of least developed countries identify health as a priority sector for adaptation—but less than 30% have an adequate health assessment or response plan.

Well-designed mitigation policies could significantly cut air pollution, cancer and heart disease, and offset a substantial fraction of investment costs.

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<http://www.who.int/globalchange/en/>