

## HEALTHY CLIMATE PRESCRIPTION

Dear Heads of State and National Delegations,

The climate crisis is the single biggest health threat facing humanity<sup>1,2</sup>. As health professionals and health workers, we recognize our ethical obligation to speak out about this rapidly growing crisis that could be far more catastrophic and enduring than the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge governments to live up to their responsibilities by protecting their citizens, neighbours, and future generations from the climate crisis.

Wherever we deliver care, in our hospitals, clinics and communities around the world, we are already responding to the health harms caused by climate change.

Examples include:

- Air pollution, most significantly from burning fossil fuels which also drives climate change, is causing more than seven million premature deaths each year<sup>3</sup>, that's 13 deaths every minute. Forest fires, waste burning, and harmful agricultural practices are also polluting our air and lungs;
- Changes in the weather and climate are causing increases in food-borne, water-borne and vector-borne diseases<sup>4</sup>;
- Increasingly frequent extreme weather events including heatwaves, storms and floods are taking the lives of thousands, disrupting the lives of millions more each year<sup>5</sup>, and impacting our own healthcare facilities. This year alone, major climate change-related health disasters occurred in China, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Canada, Germany, Belgium and many other nations;
- Food systems are increasingly disrupted by extreme weather which is exacerbating food insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition<sup>6</sup>;
- Rising sea levels are destroying homes and livelihoods, which are critical to supporting people's health;<sup>7</sup>
- Climate change impacts are taking a serious toll on peoples' mental health, causing post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety, and worsening existing conditions<sup>8</sup>.

In the 2015 Paris Agreement governments committed to take the necessary actions to hold global temperature rises well below 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C, by 2050. The most current scientific assessments<sup>9</sup> make clear that to avert catastrophic health impacts and prevent millions of climate change related deaths, the world must limit warming to 1.5°C.

The world is currently on a trajectory to warming of 2.7-3.1°C this century alone<sup>10</sup>. The Intergovernmental Panel

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<sup>1</sup> WHO, 2008, Report by the Secretariat, climate change and health. [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/climate-change/report-by-the-secretariat-on-climate-change-and-health.pdf?sfvrsn=209ff745\\_2](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/climate-change/report-by-the-secretariat-on-climate-change-and-health.pdf?sfvrsn=209ff745_2)

<sup>2</sup> Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change, 2015. Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60854-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60854-6/fulltext)

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization. 2018. Ambient air pollution data. [www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/topic-details/GHO/ambient-air-pollution](http://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/topic-details/GHO/ambient-air-pollution)

<sup>4</sup> The Lancet, 2021. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32290-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32290-X/fulltext)

<sup>5</sup> Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), 2020. The Human Cost of Disasters 2000-2019. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/human-cost-disasters-overview-last-20-years-2000-2019>

<sup>6</sup> WHO, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP. 2021. The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2021. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/the-state-of-food-security-and-nutrition-in-the-world-2021>

<sup>7</sup> IPCC, 2019. IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccc/>

<sup>8</sup> Imperial College London, 2021. The impact of climate change on mental health and emotional wellbeing: current evidence and implications for policy and practice. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/grantham/publications/all-publications/the-impact-of-climate-change-on-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing-current-evidence-and-implications-for-policy-and-practice.php>

<sup>9</sup> IPCC, 2018 Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

<sup>10</sup> Climate Action Tracker. *Temperatures*. <https://climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/> (accessed 5 Oct 2021)

on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report makes clear that governments must act now to make and implement decisive climate commitments that have a strong likelihood of limiting temperature rises to 1.5°C<sup>11</sup>. Every tenth of a degree in excess of 1.5°C will take a serious toll in people's lives and health<sup>9,12</sup>.

While no one is safe from these risks, the people whose health is being harmed first and worst by the climate crisis are the people who contribute least to the problem and who are least able to protect themselves and their families against it—people in low-income countries and communities<sup>13</sup>. Those people and nations who have benefited most from the activities that caused the climate crisis, especially fossil fuel extraction and use, have a great responsibility to do everything possible to help those who are now most at risk.

Integrating health and equity into climate policy will protect peoples' health, maximise returns on investments, and build public support for the urgently needed climate actions. Cleaner air and water, healthier and more secure food supplies, a resilient, low-carbon health sector, and greener transportation and community design are all beneficial to people, here and now. Furthermore, the health cost savings will offset the costs of taking these actions<sup>14</sup>.

We call on the leaders of every country and their representatives at COP26 to avert the impending health catastrophe by limiting global warming to 1.5°C, and to make human health and equity central to all climate change mitigation and adaptation actions.

Specifically:

- We call on all nations to update their national climate commitments under the Paris Agreement to commit to their fair share of limiting warming to 1.5°C; and we call on them to build health into those plans;
- We call on all nations to deliver a rapid and just transition away from fossil fuels, starting with immediately cutting all related permits, subsidies and financing for fossil fuels, and to completely shift current financing into development of clean energy;
- We call on high income countries to make larger cuts to greenhouse gas emissions, in line with a 1.5°C temperature goal;
- We call on high income countries to also provide the promised transfer of funds to low-income countries to help achieve the necessary mitigation and adaptation measures;
- We call on governments to build climate resilient, low-carbon, sustainable health systems; and
- We call on governments to also ensure that pandemic recovery investments support climate action and reduce social and health inequities.

The actions called for in this letter—which are necessary although not sufficient to fully address the climate and health crises—will go a long way toward protecting people worldwide. We urge our leaders to implement them, and we call on decision makers at COP26 to act now, and to act decisively.

These climate actions must be taken now to protect the planet, and the health, wellbeing and prosperity of all people alive today and for generations to come.

Sincerely,  
Healthy Climate Prescription Signatories

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<sup>11</sup> IPCC, 2021. AR6 Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. The Working Group I contribution to the Sixth Assessment – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). [Sixth Assessment Report \(ipcc.ch\)](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report/)

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organization, 2018. COP24 special report: health and climate change. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/276405>

<sup>13</sup> Prüss-Ustün, Annette, Wolf, J., Corvalán, Carlos F., Bos, R. & Neira, Maria Purificación. 2016. Preventing disease through healthy environments: a global assessment of the burden of disease from environmental risks. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241565196>

<sup>14</sup> World Health Organization, 2018. COP24 special report: health and climate change. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/276405>