

**THE WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.**  
L'ASSOCIATION MEDICALE MONDIALE, INC  
ASOCIACION MEDICA MUNDIAL, INC



# **CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH CARE**

## **ADVOCACY KIT**

**UN Climate change Conference**  
Copenhagen, 7-18 December 2009

**Content:**

Factsheet on the impact of climate change on health

Model letter to national governments

Highlights of WMA Delhi Declaration on Climate Change and Health Care

October 2009

## FACTSHEET ON THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON HEALTH

*“Even the minimum predicted shifts in climate for the 21st century are likely to be significant and disruptive”*<sup>1</sup> UN International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

According to the IPCC, climate change currently contributes to the global burden of disease and premature deaths. At this early stage the effects are small but are projected to progressively increase in all countries and regions.

Emerging evidence of climate change effects on human health shows that climate change has (confidence levels in brackets):

- Altered the distribution of some infectious disease vectors (*medium*);
- Altered the seasonal distribution of some allergenic pollen species (*high*);
- Increased heat wave related deaths (*medium*).

The IPCC authors' project climate change related human health impacts as follows (confidence levels in brackets):

- Increased malnutrition and consequent disorders, including those relating to child growth and development (*high*).
- Increased numbers of people suffering from death, disease and injury from heat waves, floods, storms, fires and droughts (*high*).
- Continued change in the range of some infectious disease vectors (*high*).
- Mixed effects on malaria; in some places the geographical range will contract, elsewhere the geographical range will expand and the transmission season may be changed (*very high*).
- Increased burden of diarrheal diseases (*medium*).
- Increased cardio-respiratory morbidity and mortality associated with ground-level ozone (*high*).
- Increased numbers of people at risk of dengue (*low*).
- Social and health inequalities due to possible desertification, natural disasters, changes in agriculture, feeding and water policy that will have consequences on both human health and human resources in health.

The authors note that climate change could bring some benefits to health, including fewer deaths from cold, although these will be outweighed by the negative effects of rising temperatures worldwide, especially in developing countries (*high confidence*).

Early research suggests that mitigation of the effects of climate change may have a link with prevention such that mitigation might have significant health benefits for both individuals and populations.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. <http://unfccc.int/2860.php> downloaded 1 September 2008

## **Model Letter**

### **To the attention of the Minister of Environment**

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of the (name of your organization + short description).

The (name of your organization) is member of the World Medical Association (WMA), the global federation of National Medical Associations representing the millions of physicians worldwide.

At its annual General Assembly in New Delhi, the WMA approved a Declaration expressing its profound concerns on the risks of increased malnutrition, death, disease and injury, particularly among the most vulnerable populations, due climate change effects.

The Declaration includes a package of proposals that aim to persuade the delegations to the upcoming UN Climate change Conference in Copenhagen to bring health to the forefront of the global warming debate, and to mitigate the serious health risks facing the world.

The impact of climate change on health will be disastrous for patients and populations unless an effective agreement on climate change is reached in December. It is critical that this agreement addresses health-related issues in a comprehensive way and that health actors, including physicians, are fully involved in the process.

On behalf of the (name of the organization) and the World Medical Association, I therefore urge to take into consideration our recommendations in the context of the coming climate change negotiations.

I would also like to bring your attention to the opportunity to include a representative of (name of your organization) in your delegation to Copenhagen, in order to assist your team in the negotiations in this area.

You will find enclosed the WMA Delhi Declaration on Health and Climate change, as well as an executive summary highlighting its main proposals directed to the UN negotiators.

I would welcome the chance to meet with you, or a member of your team, to discuss this matter further with you.

With kind regards

Signature  
Name and title



**CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH CARE**  
**Highlights of the WMA Delhi Declaration**

**UN Climate Change Talks**  
**Copenhagen, December 2009**

At its annual General Assembly in New Delhi, the World Medical Association (WMA) adopted a package of proposals designed to raise the world's awareness of the link between health and climate change and to minimize the risks of increased malnutrition, death, disease, particularly among the most vulnerable populations.

Physicians have obligations for the health and health care of individual patients. Collectively, through national and international medical associations, they also have the responsibility for the health of all people.

Given the known consequences of global climate change on health throughout the world, the WMA urges governments and the international community to acknowledge **the implication on health as a result of global warming and therefore to strive for an intergovernmental agreement that fully addresses health-related issues.**

In particular, the WMA - on behalf of its 95 national medical association members and their eight million physician members - calls on all delegates to the UN meeting in Copenhagen to support and commit to the following actions:

1. That the UN official conclusions in Copenhagen include specific goals for environmental protection, reduction of green house gas production, sustainable development and green adaptation practices, especially for the right of safe water & sewage disposal for all.
2. Noting that climate change is likely to amplify inequalities in health, to develop mechanisms to minimize the harms and health inequalities that are globally associated with climate change (adaptation), in particular that resources transferred to developing countries for climate change include designated funds to support the strengthening of health systems.
3. To fully involve physicians and national medical associations in the development of policies to prevent or reduce the health impact of climate-related emissions, in particular those initiatives, which will also improve the general health of the population, including initiatives to stop the privatization of water.
4. To work with physicians to improve the ability of patients to adapt to climate change and catastrophic weather events, through information and education programmes.
5. To plan for environmental refugees within countries.

## **Education**

6. Convinced that universal equitable education improves health capacity for all, to encourage the healthcare community to build professional awareness of the importance of the environment and global climate change to personal, community and societal health.
7. To support the development of routine health training on environmental health/medicine and public health for all students in health related disciplines.
8. To support the development of tools such as a patient environmental impact assessment and encourage physicians to evaluate their patients and their families for risk from the environment and global climate change.
9. To undertake community climate change health impact assessments, widely disseminate the results, and incorporate the results into planning for mitigation and adaptation.
10. To encourage the recruitment of physicians for work in public health and all roles in emergency planning & response to extreme climate change, including the training of other physicians.
11. To provide training for climate-change-related emergency response to physicians, particularly those living in relatively isolated regions.

## **Surveillance & research**

12. To address the gaps in research regarding climate change and health by undertaking in-depth studies on this area, including on the burden of disease caused by global climate change, the effects of poorly treated wastewater used for irrigation, and the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable populations.
13. To develop and improve the collection of statistics and the removal of barriers to the registration of births & deaths, in recognition of the special vulnerability of some populations.
14. To strengthen surveillance systems and include event alerts so that physicians are aware of climate-related events and diseases as they unfold

## **Collaboration**

15. To collaborate with governments, NGOs and other health professionals to develop knowledge about the best ways to mitigate climate change, including those adaptive and mitigation strategies that will result in improved health.
16. To incorporate national medical associations & physicians into emergency planning & response.
17. To strengthen public health systems in order to improve the capacity of communities to adapt to climate change.

