



WFPHA National Climate and Health Policy Report

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Governments unprepared for the health impacts of climate change: global survey

A new report by the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) reveals many countries are lagging in policies to protect their populations from the adverse health impacts of climate change.

Respondents from 35 countries completed the global survey, which revealed more than half of respondent countries (51%) had no national plan to adequately protect the health of their citizens from climate change.

WFPHA President Mengistu Asnake said: *“The health impacts of climate change is one of the most significant public health risks facing the global community. While there are some encouraging signs, this benchmark survey reveals many gaps in policy at the national level to respond. We encourage all national governments to develop national climate and health plans to ensure their citizens are not unprotected from the major health risks from climate change.”*

The WFPHA survey found both developed and developing nations lacked comprehensive national climate change action plans, however vulnerable developing nations appear to be less prepared, with 70% of respondent countries reporting that either their national climate policies did not address health or there was no national climate action plan in existence.

Positive examples do exist, with case studies from US and South Korea featured in the report, which the authors say offer insights into both mitigation and adaptation strategies.

The majority of respondent countries (77.1%) have no comprehensive identification of health risks of climate change projections for their citizens and 65.7% had done little towards identifying vulnerable populations and infrastructure, developing public health adaptation responses, assessing coping capacity or gaps in knowledge.

Dr Peter Orris, Co-Chair, Environmental Working Group, WFPHA said: *“This survey reveals we are failing, as a global community, to tap into the benefits that climate action will bring for nations, for communities and for individual health and well-being.”*

A recent Health and Climate Commission published in the international medical journal *The Lancet* suggests tackling climate change could be the “greatest opportunity of the 21st century” to improve health across the globe, highlighting that many strategies to respond to climate change also bring significant co-benefits for health, offering significant savings for healthcare budgets as well as increased productivity by reducing the burden of ill-health.¹

A recent study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) found carbon reduction policies can lead to big savings on health care spending and other costs related to illness — in some cases, more than 10 times the cost of policy implementation.²

The WFPHA report’s recommendations call for health protection and promotion to be a central principle in global climate policies being negotiated under the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change. It calls on all governments to develop national climate and health plans, addressing both adaptation to unavoidable warming and mitigation [to prevent further warming], and for health professional associations globally to make it a priority to raise awareness of the issue.

“The message from the global public health community is very clear,” Dr Asnake said. “We must act now to secure public health, and reap the benefits, for health budgets and the global community. Designing policies and programs at national and global level to protect people from climate change provides an immediate global health opportunity to reduce the burden of illness, while delivering a more stable climate in the longer term.”

Report is available at: <http://caha.org.au/projects/climate-change-and-health-policy-assesment-project-report-a-global-survey-2015/>

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The WFPHA is an international, nongovernmental organization composed of multidisciplinary national public health associations. It is the only worldwide professional society representing and serving the broad field of public health. WFPHA’s mission is to promote and protect global public health. Visit: <http://www.wfpha.org>

¹ Watts, N. et al. Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health, *The Lancet*, Vol. 386, No. 10006, p1861–1914. Available at: <http://www.thelancet.com/commissions/climate-change-2015>

² Resutek, A. “Cutting Emissions Pays for Itself”, News Release, MIT Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change, 25 August 2014. Available at: http://globalchange.mit.edu/news-events/news/news_id/402#.VQJL0SkRFUQ