

COP29 special report on climate change and health

Health is the argument for climate action

Climate change is making us sick, and urgent action is a matter of life and death. From the direct effects of extreme weather and air pollution to the indirect consequences of ecosystem disruption and social instability, climate change threatens physical and mental health, well-being, and life itself. These impacts are not distant or abstract – they are felt now, through record-breaking temperatures in India, deadly floods in Kenya and Spain, megafires in the Amazon, and hurricanes in the United States. The hardest hit are often those least responsible for emissions. Prioritizing health and well-being in climate action is not only a moral and legal imperative but a strategic opportunity to unlock transformative health benefits, secure economic opportunity, and ensure a just and equitable future.

Despite climate impacts that far exceed scientific models, fossil fuel emissions continue to increase, with record-high carbon emissions in 2023 and US\$ 7 trillion in explicit and implicit fossil fuel subsidies in 2022. For the health community, this is incoherent and directly at odds with our duty to safeguard health.

The COP29 Special Report on Climate Change and Health outlines priority actions from the global health community for governments, policy-makers, and other sectors to place health at the heart of climate solutions. Developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) with over 100 organizations and 300 experts, this report emphasizes health as the definitive argument for climate action across people, place and planet. Fundamental to these actions is the urgent need to end fossil fuel reliance and ensure people-centred adaptation and resilience.

PEOPLE: Climate change poses a fundamental threat to human health and survival, with ripple effects across all sectors, including economic stability and national security. Achieving equity, protecting rights, and ensuring a just transition will enable everyone to benefit from climate strategies.

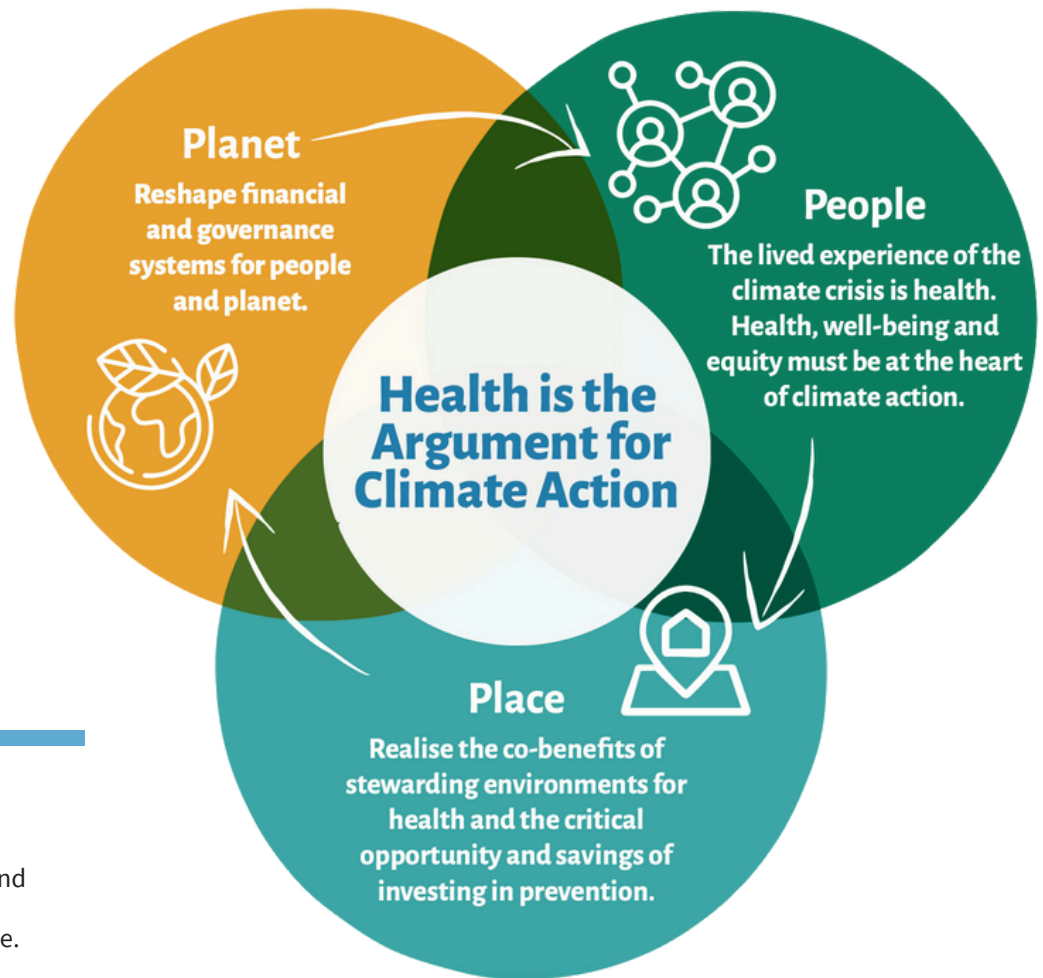
Mobilizing the health workforce and creating resilient, climate-proof health systems are key to advancing people-centred solutions.

PLACE: Health is shaped by the built environment and sustained through nature and biodiversity. Cities – home to over half of the world’s population and responsible for more than 70% of global emissions – can drive change through sustainable urban design, clean energy and transport systems, resilient housing, and improved water, sanitation and hygiene. Protecting and restoring natural systems crucial to clean air, safe water and productive land, along with promoting sustainable food systems, offer synergistic benefits at scale.

PLANET: Economic and financial systems must radically realign to support both human and planetary health. A rapid and equitable removal of fossil fuel subsidies, implementing fair carbon pricing, and mobilizing finance for climate and health action would save millions of lives per year. In the face of escalating crises, governance that centres health in climate policy-making – and climate in health policy-making – is essential.

This report aims to address the COP29 Presidency’s key priority areas through the lens of health. Health must not be sidelined or siloed in climate negotiations – it is the lived experience of climate change. This report is a call to action: the success of collective efforts to combat climate change will be measured not only by greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions but also in the tangible improvements in people’s lives. It highlights opportunities to reduce health inequalities, bridge the development gap, and presents a vision for a just, resilient, and sustainable future, where the needs and aspirations of all people are met, and where the health of communities and ecosystems is protected and promoted. Achieving this vision requires collaboration, innovation, and leadership across all sectors and scales, with health and well-being as the central outcome of climate action.

Taking Action for climate change and health



1. Our health is not negotiable.

End fossil fuel reliance and ensure people-centred adaptation and resilience.

PEOPLE

2. Unlock human development and put people at the heart of climate action.

Prioritise equity, human rights, and a just transition to ensure everyone benefits from climate action.

3. Build future-proofed health systems.

Invest in low-carbon climate-resilient health systems and a fit-for-purpose, well-supported global health workforce.

PLACE

4. Cities are key to unlocking climate and health co-benefits.

Deliver wins for health and climate by financing and implementing clean energy, zero-emissions transport, infrastructure design, effective waste management, and climate preparedness.

5. Nature and biodiversity are the foundation of our health.

Protect and restore natural systems as fundamental for healthy lives, sustainable food systems, and livelihoods.

PLANET

6. Transform financial systems and the economy away from extraction towards a well-being and circular economy.

7. Lead with bold governance that serves the many.

Empower and resource communities.

Summary of key messages and critical asks

Key Messages

Critical asks

Health is the argument for climate action.

1. Our health is not negotiable.

End fossil fuel reliance and ensure people-centred adaptation and resilience

- Prioritize health in national climate plans to accelerate the Paris Agreement goals.
- Make human health and well-being the top measure of climate success to catalyse progress and ensure well-being.
- Commit to the climate and health agendas agreed through the WHO and the UNFCCC.
- Ensure policy-makers, the private sector and economic leaders understand the immense costs of climate-related health impacts on populations and markets.
- Account for the health impacts and costs of climate change in climate commitments including the NDCs and L&D frameworks.

PEOPLE: The lived experience of the climate crisis is health – health, well-being and equity must be at the heart of climate action.

2. Unlock human development and put people at the heart of climate action.

Prioritize equity, human rights, and a just transition to ensure everyone benefits from climate action.

- Drive health-focused climate mitigation, adaptation and L&D to unlock human potential, including through climate-aware education, training, jobs, and fostering climate strategies that ensure the well-being of present and future generations' health, economies and security.
- Put equity, justice and human rights at the core of climate action by delivering a just transition that is inclusive, resilient and holds health as the top measure.

3. Build future-proofed health systems.

Invest in low-carbon climate-resilient health systems and a fit-for-purpose, well-supported global health workforce.

- Invest in and deliver low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health systems to promote health, mitigate the climate impact of the health sector, and protect and promote populations from climate and all health challenges.
- Invest in growing, employing and upskilling the health workforce to respond effectively to the health impacts of climate change. Build the health sector's capacity to directly address climate change.
- Mobilize the health workforce to initiate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience in the health sector, while guiding and supporting actions in other health-determining sectors.

Key messages
Critical asks

PLACE: Realize the co-benefits of stewarding environments for health and the critical opportunity and savings of investing in prevention.

4. Cities are key to unlocking climate and health co-benefits.

Deliver wins for health and climate through clean energy, zero-emissions transport, infrastructure design, effective waste management, and climate preparedness.

- Prioritize prevention, health promotion and well-being in climate mitigation by addressing health determinants, ensuring access to clean energy, zero-emission transport, active mobility, healthy and low-carbon food systems, and effective waste management.
- Centre health and equity in urban climate and clean air policies, regularly monitoring and evaluating their health co-benefits.
- Focus adaptation programmes on key health determinants by expanding green spaces, improving air quality, controlling vector-borne diseases, and improving heat mitigation and water management.
- Build climate-resilient urban infrastructure, including housing, transport, water, and sanitation systems to protect public health from climate impacts.
- Leverage partnerships across government, the private sector, the scientific community and residents to innovate, share knowledge, and prepare for climate risks, with improved data systems for decision-making and early warnings.

5. Nature and biodiversity are the foundation of our health and food systems.

Protecting and restoring natural systems is fundamental for healthy lives, sustainable food systems, and livelihoods.

- Advocate for biodiversity policies and NbS that protect ecosystems and essential services like water, food, medicine, and climate regulation, prioritizing conservation, sustainable use, and restoration.
- Apply a One Health approach to address the links between human, animal, and ecosystem health, tackling issues like infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance.
- Engage health workers in prescribing NbS to improve physical and mental health.
- Incorporate indigenous knowledge and leadership in biodiversity conservation, ensuring equal partnership and respecting indigenous rights.
- Promote sustainable, culturally appropriate, regenerative and diverse food systems that protect the environment, support livelihoods, and reduce harmful agricultural practices, like excessive pesticide and antibiotics use.
- Support sustainable fisheries management to protect aquatic ecosystems and ensure long-term viability.

Key messages

Critical asks

PLANET: Reshape financial and governance systems for people and planet.

6. Transform financial systems and the economy

away from extraction towards a well-being and circular economy.

- Reform fiscal policy to ensure fossil fuels are efficiently priced by ending fossil fuel subsidies and introducing a corrective tax.
- Recycle the accrued economic benefits from climate-health actions to finance the strengthening of health systems and the transition to renewable, resilient and sustainable infrastructure, energy, food and other systems.
- Substantially increase funding for health-focused climate adaptation and mitigation by shifting financial flows toward evidence-based interventions that deliver climate and health co-benefits while generating economic returns.
- Transition from growth-centric and extractive economic systems towards a well-being and circular economy that prioritizes health, and resilience and sustainability.
- Ensure the NCQG on Climate Finance and Loss and Damage Fund arrangements are substantial, fairly funded, and centre health.

7. Lead with bold governance that serves the many and empower and resource communities.

- Place health at the heart of UN climate talks.
- Ensure that health is a core component of climate change processes and policies at international, national, and local levels, with a cross-sectoral approach, including in the NAPs, NDCs, LT-LEDS.
- Implement a Health in All Policies approach to address the root causes of climate vulnerability.
- Foster international and cross-sectoral collaboration on climate-health challenges, ensuring equitable participation.
- Empower and resource communities, especially indigenous peoples and frontline communities, to lead climate and health initiatives.
- Enhance cross-sectoral cooperation to ensure climate actions protect and promote people's health.
- Increase funding and focus on interdisciplinary and intersectional research to unearth climate change health monitoring, evaluation, and solutions.
- Restrict fossil fuel industry interactions in national policy spaces and international fora such as the COP.

The full text and references can be read in the COP29 special report on climate change and health: Health is the argument for climate action

https://bit.ly/WHO_COP29
www.who.int/health-topics/climate-change