

# Strengthening Global Health In the Face of Climate Change

Climate-resilient health care is critical to achieve sustainable development.



## The urgency of the challenge

Climate change is undermining health and well-being, both directly and indirectly. Its impacts are evident across a spectrum of infectious and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including by increasing transmission risks, exacerbating symptoms, damaging mental health, and creating barriers to access to medicine and care. As of 2024, more than three billion people live in areas experiencing heat waves, flooding, and extreme weather events, which threaten health and affect poor and vulnerable communities most significantly.

As governments, industry, and civil society redouble efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement targets, low-cost actions to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change on public health outcomes and healthcare systems need to be scaled up. They will be particularly important in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where vast health inequities persist and heightened climate-related health risks threaten both lives and livelihoods. Recent calls to better connect climate and health policy, such as the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health, are promising, but they urgently need to be implemented and expanded.

## LOOKING AHEAD

# Policy and investment priorities

In 2024, UNGA 79 and the G20 and COP29 summits present strategic opportunities to accelerate concurrent progress on climate and health, including across four policy and investment priorities: scaling-up existing climate-resilient adaptations, driving innovation, strengthening regulation, and dramatically expanding financing.

## Adaptation and upscaling

Climate-resilient adaptation is underway in health sectors across the globe, driven by government initiative, development financing, and private-sector partnerships, but progress has been uneven. Effective climate action will require scaling-up, expanding, and right-sizing existing measures according to context-specific needs, and integrating with health sector development roadmaps.

## Innovation

Innovative approaches to climate-resilient health care are critical, but they need to reflect the country context and address the lived experiences of communities. Key priorities include strengthening the capacity of local health care workers to anticipate and meet the challenge of climate change while ensuring climate-resilience in the last-mile delivery of vaccines and medications, expanding energy-efficient technologies, and increasing low-carbon solutions for common therapies.

## Policy and Regulation

Regulatory frameworks and policies that address climate and health in tandem are lagging worldwide. Between 2020 and 2022, only four out of 64 countries developed and updated their Health National Adaptation Plans (HNAPs) as part of COP26 commitments, with funding for HNAPs being a key limitation. Policymakers and legislators need to collaborate with the health and climate sectors to develop and fund efforts to prevent, mitigate, and adapt to climate-induced health impacts—especially on vulnerable populations.

## Strategic Investments

Inadequate funding remains a significant barrier to national and local governments fulfilling their climate and health targets. Expanding innovative financial mechanisms, such as guarantees, could mobilize much-needed public and private capital, but they need to be implemented strategically to avoid duplicative efforts. Multilateral institutions have recently established a co-investment facility to deploy USD 122 million in climate health financing for LMICs—but an estimated USD 11 billion annually is needed to prevent and control climate-related health challenges in developing countries.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

# 250,000 additional deaths every year

Malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress will cause an estimated 250,000 additional deaths per year between 2030 and 2050 due to climate change.

# 7 million premature deaths every year

Air pollution contributes to an estimated seven million premature deaths each year by increasing the risk of stroke, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses such as COPD.

# 58% of infectious diseases

A 2022 study found that 58 percent of 375 infectious diseases, mostly vector-borne and water-borne, have been exacerbated by climate change.

# \$2–4 billion per year

Direct damages to global health are projected to be USD 2 to 4 billion per year by 2030, mainly due to treatment costs and health system strain.

# Less than 5% of climate adaptation funding for health

Between 2009 and 2019, less than 5 percent (USD 1.4 billion out of USD 29 billion) of multilateral and bilateral climate adaptation finance was allocated to health-specific projects.

Sources: WHO (2023), Our World in Data (2021), Mora et al. (2022), WHO (2023), Alcayna et al. (2023)