

POLICY STATEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH



Endorsed

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The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified climate change as the single biggest health threat facing humanity. The world is beginning to experience the early impact of climate change with:

- more frequent extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, fires, droughts, storms and floods;
- the failure of crops and disruption to food delivery systems;
- an increase in food, water and vector borne diseases;
- an increase in air pollution and a decrease in water quality;
- sea level rises and seawater incursion into arable land;
- an increase in the transmission of diseases from animals to humans;
- biodiversity loss; and
- an increase in respiratory diseases, malnutrition, and mental health issues.¹

The climate crisis is a health crisis. Through multiple simultaneous and interacting health risks, climate change is threatening to reverse years of progress in public health and sustainable development. Despite overwhelming evidence on the health impacts of climate change, countries are not delivering an adaptation response proportionate to the rapidly escalating risks their populations face, leaving them unprepared to respond to climate-related health emergencies including future pandemics.²

The health sector is a key contributor to climate change and greenhouse gas emissions through its consumption of energy and resources and the generation of waste.³ Nurses and midwives can make a significant contribution to the mitigation of climate change due to their unique role within the health system and the high level of trust in which they are held by their country's population. Climate change affects us all. We all can and must play our part if our world is to have a future.

¹ World Health Organisation 2021 *Climate change and health: key facts* <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>.

² Romanello, M. and McGushin, A. et al *The 2021 report of the Lancet countdown on health and climate change; code red for a healthy future* [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01787-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01787-6/fulltext)

³ Climate and Health Alliance 2021 *Healthy, Regenerative and Just* <https://assets.nationbuilder.com/caha/pages/2769/attachments/original/1655869490/caha-framework-2.0-FA.pdf?1655869490>

The Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation (CNMF) accepts the science that global human activity is changing the environment in which we live and placing all living things and our planet at risk.

The CNMF is committed to supporting its members to raise awareness of the impacts of climate change and in particular the risks to health and the escalation of health and other inequalities. The CNMF urges all nurses and midwives to:

1. Be informed about climate change and the risks to health, particularly the specific impacts in their own countries.
 2. Lobby governments to develop and implement national strategies for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.
 3. Advocate in their own workplace for the development and implementation of environmentally sustainable practices and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.
 4. Act as a role model professionally by adopting sustainable practice; the careful use of energy and resources; the reduction and proper disposal of waste; engaging in climate change and adaptation research; and providing health and climate change education to engage with colleagues and raise awareness.
 5. Act as a role model personally by reducing household waste, recycling where possible, avoiding unnecessary travel, and protecting the natural environment to prevent biodiversity loss.
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