



IFMSA

International Federation of
Medical Students' Associations

IFMSA Policy Statement Climate Change and Health

Adopted by the 65th March Meeting General Assembly in St. Paul's Bay, Malta, March 2016

Summary

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) represents 1.3 million medical students from over 100 countries across the globe. We acknowledge climate change as the largest threat and opportunity to global health in the 21st century, and call for human health to be placed at the centre of the United Nations Framework for Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) international negotiations where it will stand as an effective framework from which to implement a fair and ambitious plan of action following the adoption of the Paris Agreement. In this, we seek to preserve a society which promotes equity, avoids future conflicts and paves the road towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Introduction

Following the UNFCCC's COP15/CMP5 in Copenhagen and the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), there exists universal political, scientific and public health consensus that climate change is both man-made and occurring at unprecedented rates, posing a very significant threat to the health of global populations (1).

Disturbances in climate stability will severely harm the health of humans, animals and the environment through an increase in extreme weather events, natural disasters, floods and resulting diarrheal disease, degradation of arable land, nutritional impacts, mass migration, and violent conflict.

Climate change will also play a greater role in the spread of infectious diseases by widening the areas of spread of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever by creating more favorable conditions for climate sensitive disease vectors. (2) Changes to the climate resulting in water scarcity and decreased sanitation alone will have devastating effects on public health systems in affected areas. Furthermore, extreme drought linked to climate change is creating conditions that contributed to civil instability (3).

Therefore, climate change mitigation and adaptation represent a non-regret necessity that takes the form of basic public requirements and efforts towards the SDGs: promotion of healthy lifestyles; use of sustainable clean energy sources; guarantee of food security, water and sanitation; clean air; early warning systems; vector control and disaster risk reduction.



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At COP21/CMP11, the world came together to express a new vision of ambition and managed to agree on a compromised climate agreement to take action following 2020. This agreement differs fundamentally from the Kyoto protocol in that it does not set binding emissions reduction targets for a group of countries but sets the objective that the whole world needs to reach and to which all countries are to contribute.

Main Text

As future health professionals, our duty of care will include not only future patients, but communities and public health at local, national and global levels. The impact of climate change on health is a threat that we will see in our future scope of practice if the right measurements of prevention are not taken. As an organization, we acknowledge the significant co-benefits of health mitigation strategies such as: developments in areas of transport, agriculture, electricity generation and household energy use (4). IFMSA recognizes the need for building climate resilient health systems that can protect the promotion and provision of health despite the current and future risks presented by climate change (5). We support the policy position of the WHO in regards to climate change and health, the Climate Health Council's Prescription for a Healthy Planet and the 5th assessment report of the IPCC (6).

The IFMSA affirms its stance that:

1. Climate change, particularly global warming, is directly attributable to human activity.
2. Climate change is the largest threat to global health in the 21st century, but with preventative action the biggest opportunity.
3. Climate change has a direct impact on humans, animals and the environment.
4. The impacts of climate change will affect the world's most disadvantaged populations earlier and more severely than more resourceful populations, and as a result will exacerbate inequity and hinder progress towards the SDGs.
5. Immediate and sustainable mitigation and adaptation action must be taken on a local, national and global level to safeguard global public health and preserve our accomplishments over infectious diseases and towards health care access.
6. The future costs associated with climate change must be shared fairly between nations, taking into account equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR), in the light of different national circumstances.
7. Health must be placed at the centre of any international negotiations on climate change for a global deal.
8. The international health community must actively engage in the debate and negotiation progress taking place under the UNFCCC.



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9. Health professionals as individuals and their representative organizations must take an external advocacy role in encouraging their local governments, health and other relevant ministers to act in a way that reduces national emissions adopting the health in all policies approach and prepare for the future consequences of climate change on health

In light of the above stance and recent events, the IFMSA calls

Governments to:

1. Invest time, effort and finances into mechanisms, to be provided from countries and business companies, to achieve measurable carbon reduction, create jobs and contribute to a more sustainable world.
2. Meet an emissions trajectory consistent with a 1.5 degree long term goal.
3. Create a society wide transition to a carbon free economy, through the divestment of fossil fuels and the immediate withdrawal of fossil subsidies, in order to accelerate the transition to sustainable societies that are beneficial to human health, through country-specific emissions reduction targets, which make steady steps for the agreed global objective to be reached and adapted according to each nation's capacity.
4. Protect elements crucial for equity within the climate negotiations including the recognition and implementation of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) in all areas of work on climate change.
5. Engage in a fair international negotiation process under the UNFCCC, in which the rights of every country and their peoples are respected and represented equally.
6. Provide a strong mechanism to address loss and damages supported by financial means that are not in competition with climate finance for mitigation and adaptation, as well as an adequate valuation of non-economic losses which include health and human life.

The IFMSA, World Health Organization, medical students, medical practitioners, healthcare providers and organizations representing the interests of current and future health professionals to:

1. Take the lead in educating the public on the likely effects of climate change on health, as well as directly lobbying key stakeholders including governments, to take action on the issue.
2. Reduce carbon emissions from the healthcare sector.
3. Integrate climate change and its threat to health within the curricula of medical schools worldwide and into capacity building programs targeting health professionals from a multidisciplinary approach.
4. Further continue the initiative of the WHO Country profiles on climate and health, in collaboration between NMOs, governments and WHO. (8)



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Researchers and funders to:

1. Produce stronger evidence on the linkages between climate change and health from the health and research communities
2. The IFMSA calls for what science and justice demands of the global community - a reduction of carbon emissions to levels which ensure the survival of our planet's ecosystem and the protection of human health.

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