

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General, World Health Organization

2019 Report on the WHO-Civil Society Working Group to Advance Action on Climate and Health

14 January 2020

Dear Director-General Tedros,

Greetings!

We are pleased to share with you the 2019 report on the work of the WHO-Civil Society Working Group to Advance Action on Climate and Health.

The WHO-Civil Society Working Group (WG) was established in 2019 at your request, communicated in a meeting with representatives of leading health civil society organizations alongside COP23 in Bonn. The WG establishes a formal structure to support collaboration between the WHO and health civil society, with the goal of strengthening health action on climate change.

The WG comprises representatives from 13 member organizations. Membership in the WG rotates, with each organization serving two years, and half of the group rotating each year. It is co-convened by the WHO and the Global Climate and Health Alliance.

The key objectives of the working group are:

1. Increase health sector civil society mobilization to strengthen national and international responses to climate change, with a focus on health.
2. Strategic communications to make health a central focus in responses to climate change.
3. Advise WHO on areas where additional evidence-based policy guidance may be needed.
4. Support the Global Climate and Health Summit and organize sessions at WHO climate change and air pollution conferences.

The first term members were confirmed in early 2019, and the Working Group was formally launched at a side event alongside the 2019 World Health Assembly. Since then, the group has met virtually bimonthly, with subcommittees (Advocacy, Research) that meet in the intervening months. Our second in-person meeting was convened on Thursday, December 5th alongside COP25 in Madrid.

Year One Accomplishments

- **UNGA:** Working Group members supported communications around the UNGA Climate Action Summit.
- **COP25 Climate & Health Summit:** Working Group members partnered on organising the [Global Climate and Health Summit](#), 7th December 2019, on the margins of COP25. Member representatives also served as speakers and moderators during the event and served on the Program Advisory Committee to design the event program. The Global Climate and Health Summit is convened (nearly) annually, as a collaboration between WHO and the Global Climate and Health Alliance, and other partners. Despite the short notice and change in venue, the Summit this year saw an overwhelming response and registration of over 600 delegates in Madrid, providing a great opportunity to build discourse and synergy around the emergent climate and health crisis through impactful plenary speeches and break-out sessions over the course of the day. In Santiago on December 6th, Chilean Summit partners

hosted the Chilean National Workshop of the Global Climate and Health Summit, with 80 invited participants.

- **Media Coverage at COP25:** The closely coordinated efforts of WHO and civil society put health in the COP25 media narrative right out of the gate, and in a way not seen before. Media coverage (sampling) --
 - Pollution Pods video coverage -- [Reuters](#), [Al Jazeera](#)
 - Dr. Maria Neira, WHO, op ed -- [China Watch](#)
 - Spanish media -- [EFE](#), [EFE Verde](#)
 - International media -- [Notimex](#), [The World News](#), [Indian Times](#), [Energy Reporters](#), [Scoop World](#)
 - Youth leaders at Summit - [COPE](#)

Subcommittees: Research, Advocacy

The Working Group currently has two sub-committees, one focusing on research and the other on advocacy, leading WG activities in these two broad areas.

- **Research Gaps and Research Translation:** The research sub-committee will be conducting a landscape analysis of major research initiatives on climate and health, to identify any gaps, research priorities, and opportunities for knowledge translation that move research into policy and action. This will, in turn, inform and strengthen the work of the advocacy sub-committee.
- **Advocacy for Healthy NDCs:** The advocacy sub-committee, including civil society members and WHO representatives, developed an [advocacy brief on health in country NDCs](#) for health civil society representatives attending COP, to prepare them to advocate to country delegations about the importance of incorporating health into their country NDCs. The brief, advocacy tracking tools ([mapping](#) and [outreach planning](#)) and daily health sector consultations during COP supported, organized and documented outreach to strategically identified countries. Concurrently, a commentary on the importance of a “healthy NDC”, [“The Paris agreement: charting a low-emissions path for a child born today”](#), authored by the chair of the advocacy sub-committee, was published in the Lancet Planetary Health journal on December 10.
- **Advocacy Strategy for 2020 and for COP26 as “the Health COP”:** In a sequence of meetings at COP, the WG began developing an advocacy strategy to align health sector advocacy on climate change through 2020 in the lead up to COP26. Health civil society, globally, will be invited to support and participate in the aligned strategies through webinars, briefings, communities of practice, and other coordination activities. We hope this advocacy will be instrumental as well in our efforts to make COP26 the “Health COP”. With a rising tide of health professionals and health organizations interested in addressing climate change, coordination by the leading, experienced organizations that make up the WG will be essential to ensure all of that new interest and energy aligns strategically to deliver real impact on climate action in 2020.

Looking Ahead

- The WG meets in person twice a year, at COP and at WHA. The next in-person meeting will be at WHA73 in Geneva in May.
- The WG will be a key vehicle for coordination and alignment of health civil society in 2020, leading into COP26, and potentially thereafter, allowing for coordination between the strong and vocal advocacy and research capacities of an independent civil society, and the evidence-based, authoritative role that WHO plays and WHO’s ability to engage directly with ministries and governments. This will unfold with a concrete set of strategic advocacy campaigns, designed to achieve climate & health wins in countries while building momentum for more ambitious NDCs.
- In early 2020, the WG will contribute to the development of a strategic communications plan for the year, designed to elevate health in the climate conversation.

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- The WG will contribute to and support WHO's Global Climate and Health Conference as well as the annual Global Climate and Health Summit. These events will be mounted jointly November 14-15 in Glasgow, on the margins of COP26.
- The WG will assess existing research initiatives and advise on gaps and ways to strengthen research to policy translation.
- Since 2011, World Environmental Health Day has been celebrated on 26 September. This date is currently recognized and celebrated globally. It would be interesting if WHO recognized the day and could put it on the official calendar. <https://ifeh.org/wehd/index.html>

The Working Group looks forward to continued collaboration between the WHO and health civil society, and to working together on bold action to ensure health is protected from climate change.

Sincerely,

*Jeni Miller, PhD, Executive Director, **Global Climate and Health Alliance** (co-chair)*

*Bernard Kadasia, President, **Alliance for Health Promotion***

*Prof. Nelson Gouveia, MD, PhD, **Associação Brasileira de Saúde Coletiva***

*Courtney Howard, MD, President, **Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment***

*Fiona Armstrong, BN, Grad Dip Journ, MPPP, Executive Director, **Climate and Health Alliance Australia**; A/Prof Ying Zhang, PhD, **Climate and Health Alliance** (Australia)*

*Genon Jensen, ED, **Health and Environment Alliance***

*Josh Karliner, International Director for Program & Strategy, **Health Care Without Harm***

*Prof. Peter Byass, PhD, **INDEPTH Network***

*Nathalie Bassaler, Head of Policy & Advocacy, French RC; Emanuele Capobianco, Director Health & Care, IFRC; Maarten van Aalst, Director, RCRC Climate Centre, **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies***

*Howard Catton, RN, CEO, **International Council of Nurses***

*Prof. Susana Paixao, MD, PhD, President-Elect, **International Federation of Environmental Health***

*Omnia El Omrani, Liaison for Public Health, **International Federation of Medical Students' Associations***

*Poornima Prabhakaran, MBBS, PhD, Deputy Director, **Public Health Foundation of India***

*Lujain Alqodmani, MD, **World Medical Association***