

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

2020 Report on the WHO-Civil Society Working Group to Advance Action on Climate and Health

December 2020

Dear Director-General Tedros,

Greetings!

We are pleased to share with you the 2020 report on the work of the WHO-Civil Society Working Group to Advance Action on Climate and Health.

To highlight two major accomplishments this year:

- We are proud to note the influence of our joint initiative to push for a green and “healthy recovery” from the COVID-19 pandemic. In May, the Working Group was instrumental in delivering a “healthy recovery” letter to G20 leaders from organizations representing over 40 million health professionals. This letter paralleled the release of the *WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19*, and together generated over 550 media stories, in countries around the world, as well as policy advocacy by health groups in several countries.
- Working together, WHO and health civil society also placed health front and center in the UNFCCC virtual Race to Zero Dialogues, with our Health Dialogue kicking off the two weeks as the first day of the series. Dialogue continues with the UK COP26 presidency, to foster strong health framing of climate change in the lead up to and during COP26 in Glasgow.

The WHO-Civil Society Working Group (WG) was established in 2019 in response to your request made alongside COP23 in Bonn. The WG is co-convened by the WHO and the Global Climate and Health Alliance, and established a formal structure to support collaboration between the WHO and health civil society.

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 WG comprises representatives from 13 member organizations. Membership in the WG rotates, with each organization serving two years. Due to the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, all current WG members will serve through COP26, which was postponed from 2020, to 2021. This will allow existing members to mentor incoming members and will continue the momentum the WG has gained in its first full year.

The WG was formally launched at a side event alongside the 2019 World Health Assembly, and met in person at COP25 in Madrid. The WG was scheduled to have their next in-person meeting at the Seventy-Third World Health Assembly in 2020, however due to the pandemic, this meeting took place online over two days. In addition to these longer, ideally in-person meetings, the group meets virtually bimonthly, with subcommittees (Advocacy, Research) that meet in the intervening months.

Year Two Accomplishments

- **Healthy Recovery Letter:** Members of the WG led a mobilisation of over 350 health professionals' organisations representing over 40 million doctors, nurses and other health professionals to call for a green and "healthy recovery" from COVID-19. [The letter](#) demanded that governments develop COVID-19 economic recovery plans that put health protection and promotion at their core, directing investments to ensure strong public health systems, clean air, clean water and a stable climate. This letter engaged [new members of the health community](#) in climate action, garnered significant and ongoing [media attention](#), and shaped the broader global narrative about what a healthy recovery from COVID-19 would mean, also supporting health group advocacy in, e.g., [Canada](#), the [UK](#), [Australia](#) and the [EU](#). Medical journal mentions included, e.g. [BMJ](#), [NEJM](#), [The Lancet PH](#), [RBMFC](#), [MJA](#). It was coordinated with WHO's release of its Healthy Recovery manifesto. The reach and power of the rollout of these two documents exemplifies the ambition of the Working Group to foster aligned efforts by WHO and civil society, bringing the greatest strengths of each to advancing a coordinated and aligned message and goals.
- **Race to Zero Climate and Health Dialogues:** The [Race to Zero](#) Dialogue on Climate & Health on November 9th brought together local and global actors to place health and equity at the center of ambitious climate action. Through a series of virtual events, hosted throughout a 24-hour period, the dialogue envisioned how a healthy, equitable recovery from COVID-19 could drive rapid decarbonization of the world economy. WG members provided feedback on the overall event design and participated as speakers and attendees. This event also advanced the WG priority of making COP26 the "Health COP" by aligning the five COP26 Campaign aims with integrative health aims, and [supporting the UK COP26 Presidency in advancing these messages](#).
- **Health Student Pilot Webinar:** WG members identified supporting health student education on climate and health as a key priority. With the support of GCHA, members of the International Federation of Medical Students Association and the International Federation of Environmental Health collaborated to produce a webinar on climate change for health students in Portugal. The webinar was widely attended and provided space for conversations between and within health disciplines about actions that could be taken to incorporate climate change into health curricula. We hope to use this model to support other webinars in the coming year. The event drew consensus on the need to include the topic of climate change in the curricula of health professionals. A report is being prepared to be sent to the Portuguese government, namely to those responsible for science and higher education in Portugal.
- **Updating the Position Paper on Research Gaps in Climate and Health:** The research sub-committee has moved forward with a literature review of climate and health research published in the past 10 years, as an update of the [2009 research priorities paper](#). The group will prepare a position paper outlining remaining and emerging gaps in the research to be released in 2021. This will help guide research funding and priorities in the coming years. The findings may also support and inform the work of the advocacy subcommittee.
- **Regional Consultations:** Building on the engagement of the global health community that began through the Healthy Recovery letter the WG is planning a series of Regional Consultations on Climate Change and Health to be hosted in collaboration with the 6 WHO Regional Offices in March and April of 2021.

Looking Ahead

- The WG will welcome a new cohort of 7 members in January 2021
- If circumstances allow, the WG will meet in person at WHA74 in Geneva in May, and at COP26 in Glasgow in December.

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- The WG will release a position paper on climate change and health in spring 2021
- The WG will host consultations drawing together health civil society in the six WHO regions
- The WG will be a key vehicle for coordination and alignment of health civil society in 2021, leading into COP26. 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.
- 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 6-7 in Glasgow, on the margins of COP26.

The WG 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, Past-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***

*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, **International Federation of Environmental Health***

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

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

*Lujain Alqodmani, MSc MBBS MIHMEP, Co-chair of Environment Caucus, **World Medical Association***