

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

2021 Report on the WHO-Civil Society Working Group to Advance Action on Climate and Health

December 2021

Dear Director-General Dr Tedros,

It has been an important year for work on climate and health, and the WHO-Civil Society Working Group to Advance Action on Climate and Health is proud to report on the outcome of the ongoing collaboration between WHO and health civil society to address this critical global challenge. With each year, the benefits of working in close collaboration become more evident, and as the civil society partners in this collaboration, we are grateful to you for making this joint work possible.

The Working Group (WG) was established in 2019 in response to your request during COP23 in Bonn. It is co-convened by the WHO and the Global Climate and Health Alliance, and co-chaired by WHO ADG for Healthier Populations, Dr. Naoko Yamamoto, and GCHA executive director, Dr. Jeni Miller. The WG serves as a formal structure to support collaboration between the WHO and health civil society, powerfully increasing our joint impact on climate decision making to protect health.

To highlight two major accomplishments this year:

- From April through October, we convened Regional Consultations on Climate and Health in each of the six WHO regions. Health representatives participated from over 135 out of 193 countries across the six regions. The consultations provided input into the recommendations in WHO COP26 report *The Health Argument for Climate Action*, and strengthened health engagement on climate change ahead of COP26, contributing to the strongest presence of health at a COP to date, including representatives from several Working Group member organizations.
- In the run up to COP26, the WG played key roles in drafting, garnering sign on, and publicizing the Healthy Climate Prescription letter, signed by over 600 organizations representing 46 million health workers, to highlight climate change as a health emergency and to call for urgent, ambitious and equitable climate action, and investment in resilient, low carbon health systems. The letter was launched at a WHO press conference alongside the WHO COP26 report, and was delivered to representatives of the COP26 and incoming COP27 Presidencies at a COP Presidency event. It brought the voice of the health community powerfully to the climate negotiations. While we missed you at the COP Presidency event, we greatly appreciated your personal signature on the letter, and strong support for this message from the health community worldwide.

About the Working Group

The WG comprises representatives from 13 member organizations. Membership in the WG rotates, with each organization serving two years, plus an advisory year, for a total of 19 active members at a time.

The WG was formally launched at a side event alongside the 2019 World Health Assembly. It is intended to meet virtually bimonthly; and to meet in-person twice a year alongside the WHA, and

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alongside the UNFCCC climate negotiations (COPs). Due to the pandemic, however, all WG meetings have been conducted virtually in 2020 and 2021. The WG also has three subcommittees, on Advocacy, Research and Capacity Building, which meet as needed.

Key objectives:

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.

Year Three Accomplishments

- **Regional Consultations:** Building on the engagement of the global health community in the previous year, in 2021 the WG hosted a series of [Regional Consultations](#) on Climate Change and Health, coordinated by GCHA and the global WHO climate team, in collaboration with the 6 WHO Regional Offices. Health representatives participated from over 135 out of 193 countries across the six regions. The consultations gathered insights about the impacts the health community is already seeing from climate change in each region, emerging solutions, and needs and recommendations to policy makers to ensure a strong and healthy recovery from the pandemic and a sustainable future with a healthy climate. The consultations connected organizations and bolstered regional networks, contributing to GCHA's establishment of the Climate and Health Network for Latin America and the Caribbean; and the formation by consultation participants of a regional network for climate and health in Southeast Asia. Through the Regional Consultations the health community around the world also provided input into the WHO special report to the UNFCCC, [The Health Argument for Climate Action](#), which was delivered at COP26. We are grateful to have had the active involvement of WG co-chair ADG Naoko Yamamoto, who provided opening remarks for every one of the consultations (across multiple time zones!).
- **Healthy Climate Prescription:** The WHO COPO26 report was launched at the same time as the [Healthy Climate Prescription](#) letter, signed by organizations representing more than [46 million health professionals](#), making up two-thirds of the global health workforce. The open letter calls for national leaders and COP26 country delegations to urgently step up climate action, and stated, "We call on the leaders of every country and their representatives at COP26 to avert the impending health catastrophe by limiting global warming to 1.5°C, and to make human health and equity central to all climate change mitigation and adaptation actions." It was [delivered to decision makers at COP26](#), including country representatives from COP26 president the United Kingdom (UK), COP 27 president Egypt, and the secretariat of UN Climate Change (UNFCCC). The letter was launched at a WHO press conference, alongside the launch of the WHO COP26 report, lending the health community's worldwide support to the WHO report recommendations; and increasing the visibility, reach and credibility of the letter, demonstrating yet again the power of collaboration between WHO and civil society, as represented in the work of the WG. The [International Council of Nurses](#) and the [World Heart Federation](#), among other signatories, released their own press statements about the letter, while health organizations in [Canada](#) sent a locally adapted version of it to their Prime Ministers; and 20,000 medical and health students in India used it to develop their own Youth Charter and call to action to the Indian government. The letter garnered media attention to climate and health ahead of COP26 (see [Sky News](#), [The Guardian](#)), and contributed to media attention to health during and after COP (see [Reuters](#), [BBC](#), [Democracy Now](#), [New York Times](#)).
- **Capacity Building Webinars:** In the months leading up to COP26, the Capacity Building Subcommittee presented key sessions as part of a GCHA [series of webinars](#) focussed

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building skills and providing tools to help ensure that advocacy by the climate and health community was its strongest yet, and to build momentum as the COP negotiations approached.

- **Research Gaps Report:** The Research Subcommittee completed their review of climate and health research published in the past 10 years, as an update of WHO's 2009 research priorities paper, and launched the findings in a WHO report during COP26, in an event at the WHO Pavillion. The report, "[Climate change and health research: current trends, gaps and perspectives for the future](#)", found significant research gaps, including in regions highly impacted by climate change (e.g. the African region), and gaps in studies of climate and health solutions, needed to guide effective action. Next steps include disseminating the findings, to call for needs-focused research investment to address the gaps identified.
- **Global Climate and Health Conference:** With the involvement of members of the Working Group, WHO and GCHA and other health partners collaborated to mount the [Global Climate and Health Conference](#), held on November 6th at Glasgow Caledonian University. The conference was a hybrid event to allow for participation by those unable to travel to Glasgow, doing our part to address the access inequities experienced with COP as a whole. Over 600 people registered for the conference, attending in person or virtually. With a number of high level speakers, the conference carried a strong social justice and climate equity theme, and featured as well a focus on intersectoral collaboration to address climate change. At the conference, the US Department of Health and Human Services announced its commitment to make the US health system low carbon and climate resilient, as part of the COP26 Health Programme.
- **Events at the WHO Pavilion at COP26:** For the first time, the health community had a clear visible presence and 'footprint' at a UNFCCC COP, in the WHO Health Pavilion. [More than 60 events](#) over the two weeks of COP showcased the health arguments for ambitious climate action across many different sectors and topics. WG member organizations played key roles, organizing sessions and serving as speakers in Pavillion events. Because the Pavilion offered hybrid meeting capacity, the sessions were internationally accessible, for both speakers and audience, at a COP where access inequity was an ongoing concern for some of the most vulnerable and impacted nations. The events were [livestreamed on the GCHA YouTube channel for real-time access](#), and [recordings of all of the COP26 health events](#) can be found on the WHO website.

None of these activities could have been accomplished at the same level, with the same impact, or in some cases, at all, without the close collaboration on climate change that the WG enables between WHO and health civil society.

Looking Ahead

- Six of the original cohort of 13 members rotate off at the end of this year. In January 2022, the WG will welcome a new cohort of 6 members in their place. Groups that rotate off will become Alumni members and continue to be important advisors and partners.
- If circumstances allow, the WG will meet in person at WHA75 in Geneva in May, and at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh in November 2022.
- The WG will build upon the publication of its Research Gaps paper to generate conversations in the climate and health research community and among the funding community to stimulate research that responds to real gaps and needs, rather than furthering research in overstudied areas.
- With advocacy leadership from co-chair GCHA, the WG will build upon the reach and impact of the Healthy Climate Prescription letter to increase local and global advocacy from the health community calling for the key demands articulated in the letter.

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- The WG will continue to support health sector capacity and training to address climate change, with the release and dissemination of a letter to deans of medical schools calling for incorporation of health into the medical curriculum.
- The WG will continue to be a vehicle for coordination and alignment of health civil society in 2022, throughout the year, as well as in the run up to and during COP27. 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 and equitable climate action nationally and at COP27.
- The WG will contribute to and support WHO's COP27 Health Pavilion.

The health community cannot slow down -- we are making progress but are still far from achieving the policies, programs and investments we need to ensure a healthy, equitable and sustainable future for humanity. In 2021, we saw the most significant presence and visibility of health in any COP to date, and we hope that in 2022 your calendar will permit you to bring the added influence of your presence to ensuring that health is at the center of COP27 climate negotiations.

The WG has continued to dramatically strengthen collaboration between WHO and health civil society on the critical intersection of health with the climate crisis, and every year we have become more adept at working together to use our respective roles for maximum impact. The WG looks forward to continued collaboration between the WHO and health civil society, and to working together on bold action to ensure all people's health is protected from climate change.

Sincerely,

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

*Bernard Kadasia, President; H. Paramesh, MD, **Alliance for Health Promotion***

*Githinji Gitahi, MD, CEO; Martin Muchangi, Director, WASH&NTDs, **Amref Health Africa***

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

*Courtney Howard, MD, Past-President; Claudel Pétrin-Desrosiers, MD, **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)*

*Jacqueline Ponzo, MD; Paola Rava, MD, **Confederación IberoAmericana de Medicina Familiar (CIMF)***

*Genon Jensen, ED; Anne Stauffer, Deputy Director, **Health and Environment Alliance***

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

*Donna Murray, CEO; Paul Gibson, Director of Policy and Research **Indigenous Allied Health Australia***

*Lasha Gogvadze, Senior Health Officer, IFRC; 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; Erica Burton, RN **International Council of Nurses***

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

*Mohamed Eissa, Liaison for Public Health, **International Federation of Medical Students' Associations***

*Prof Jonathan Klein, MD, MPH, Treasurer; Prof Ruth Etzel, MD, PhD, Chair, Environmental Health Strategic Advisory Group, **International Pediatric Association***

*Julia Shu-Li Wang, PhD, Chair, **International Society for Environmental Epidemiology - Asia & Western Pacific***

*Maria Guevara, MD, International Medical Secretary; Carol Devine, Climate & Environment Lead, MSF Canada, **Médecin Sans Frontières***

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

*Liz Hanna, MD, Chair Environment Working Group, **World Federation of Public Health Associations***

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