

# Initiative on Building Climate Resilient and Environmentally Sustainable Health Systems

## I. The challenge

Climate change affects health through a range of pathways, including increasing the frequency and intensity of hazardous extreme weather events such as heatwaves, floods and droughts; altering transmission of water-borne and vector-borne infectious disease, and undermining the environmental and social determinants of health such as the quality and quantity of freshwater supplies, and of food.

As observed during COVID-19 pandemic, health systems are the main line of defence in protecting populations from emerging threats, including the impacts of a changing and more variable climate. It is essential to ensure that health systems can continue to deliver essential public health functions during extreme events and under climate stress, and for them to play their critical role in a coordinated multisectoral response to emergencies.

Climate change places stress on the capacity of health systems to prevent, adapt and respond to increased health risks and can also be impacted by shocks posed by increased weather events. In order to protect the health of populations from the effects of climate change and avoid widening health inequities, countries must build climate resilient health systems.

## II. Context and Opportunity

At the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019, the UN Secretary General established a coalition, co-chaired by the UK and Egypt, alongside Bangladesh, Malawi, the Netherlands, St Lucia and the United Nations Development Programme, to raise ambition on adaptation and resilience. The coalition launched the [Call for Action on Adaptation and Resilience](#) that has now been signed by over 120 countries, the European Union and 86 organizations. The Call for Action encourages countries and organizations to “plan, act, and finance” adaptation and resilience.

The importance of health risks is recognized in the major multilateral climate agreements - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and its Paris agreement - and through the World Health Assembly ([WHA Resolution 61.19](#)).

There is now widespread consensus on the main areas of action necessary to address the health risks of climate change, documented in the [action agenda](#) agreed at the second WHO Global Conference on Health and Climate, in July 2016. This identifies increasing the climate resilience of health systems and healthcare facilities at its frontline as an urgent priority.

There is a need for a significant increase in to address the health impacts of climate change while strengthening health resilience. Reports from the NDC Partnership, NAP Global Network and from the Green Climate Fund indicate that health is one of the sectors where demands for support most frequently are left unmet. Whereas approximately two-thirds of national commitments to address climate change (Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement), [cite the importance of health](#) and 50% of countries have [strategies on climate change and health](#), a much lower proportion of countries have developed [health adaptation plans](#), and less than 2% of multilateral climate finance is allocated to health projects.

However, approximately half of all WHO Member States (and the majority of LMICs) have prioritized health resilience and adaptation in their requests to WHO for support (Country Support Plans) in 2019 and 2020.

WHO is ready to lead an action aiming to increase the resilience of health systems globally. The technical support package required for countries to do so is readily available as it was developed by WHO in collaboration with multiple partners and countries. The support follows a risk assessment and management approach that is summarized in the figure below. All steps are informed by the [WHO Operational Framework for Building Climate Resilient Health Systems](#) and technical guidance and support is available for each step of the process.

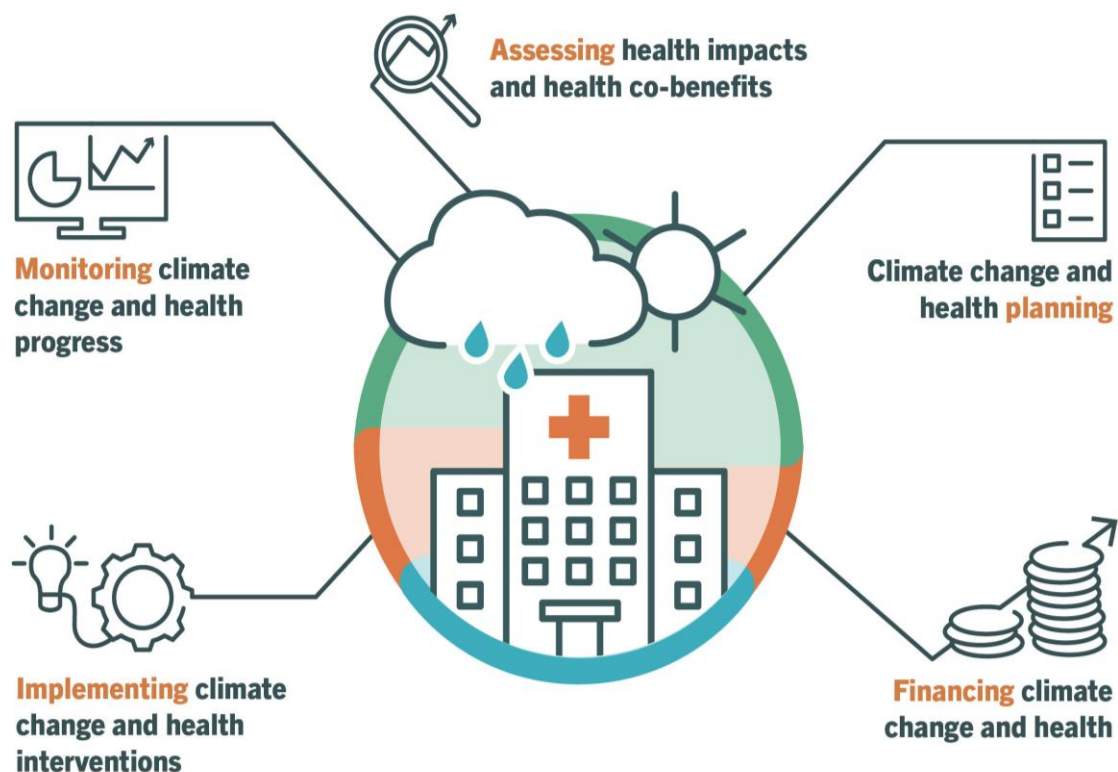


Figure 1. Process for building climate resilient health.

### III. Vision, mission and purpose

The **Climate Resilient Health Systems Initiative** will support the goals of the Adaptation Action Coalition (AAC) by addressing the health impacts of climate change while strengthening health resilience.

**Vision:** All health systems improve resilience to climate change by 2030

**Mission:** To accelerate global action on health adaptation and ensure that people, health systems and health care facilities are climate resilient

**Our purpose:** Inspiring a step-change in health adaptation and health resilience action

#### IV. How to join the Initiative

Governments can join the initiative by committing to conduct climate change and health vulnerability and adaptation assessments (V&As); develop a health National Adaptation Plan (HNAP); or by allocating, or applying for, climate finance for health action.

A full list of the commitments governments can make to join this initiative and to be announced at COP26 are provided below:

##### **1. Assessing:**

- 1.1. Commit to conduct a climate change and health vulnerability and adaptation assessment (V&As), by a stated target date;
- 1.2. Commit to assess the carbon footprint of your health system/ facilities (including supply chains);

##### **2. Planning:**

- 2.1. Commit to develop a health National Adaptation Plan (HNAP) informed by the health V&A, which forms part of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), to be published by a certain target date;
- 2.2. Commit to develop an action plan or roadmap by a set date to develop a sustainable low carbon health system (including supply chains) which also considers human exposure to air pollution.
- 2.3. Commit to set a target date by which to achieve health system net zero emissions (aimed at HICs and MICs);
- 2.4. Integrate health into your Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC);

##### **3. Financing:**

- 3.1. Commit to use the V&A and HNAP to facilitate access to climate change funding for health (e.g. project proposals submitted to the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund (GCF) or Adaptation Fund (AF) or GCF Readiness programme);

For more information on the Initiative on Climate Resilient Health Systems kindly contact Elena Villalobos Prats ([villalobose@who.int](mailto:villalobose@who.int))