

Health must be central to climate change policies, say experts

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Health must be taken into account in climate change mitigation strategies. It is not widely appreciated that there are many benefits to health that are likely to accrue from a low carbon economy, say experts in a special supplement published in the *British Medical Journal* today. They believe that health professionals "are uniquely placed to guide the climate change conversation towards better policies that are good for the planet and for people."

It follows a high level meeting, hosted by the *BMJ* in October 2011, where doctors and security experts warned that climate change poses an immediate and grave threat to the health and security of people around the world, and called for urgent action to secure our future wellbeing.

Professor Sir Andy Haines from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Dr Carlos Dora from the [World Health Organisation](#) argue that the benefits to health of a low carbon economy "have frequently been overlooked" yet "they offer the promise of accelerating progress towards both public health and climate goals."

For example, shifting away from burning coal for electricity will not only cut [carbon dioxide emissions](#) and health damaging pollutants; one estimate suggests it would avert around 90,000 premature deaths annually in India alone. And increasing active travel in cities will not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, it also has the potential to cut rates of heart disease, obesity, depression, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, breast and colon cancer.

Furthermore, investments in active transport are generally excellent value for money, making many of these policies highly attractive on both health and economic grounds, say the authors.

They argue that, too often, [climate change policies](#) "emphasise technology heavy solutions which are not necessarily optimal for health or health equity." For instance, focusing on improved fuels and vehicles can reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, but they do not yield benefits for traffic injuries, noise or physical activity.

They say that such strategies "should be subject to closer health relevant analysis." This would also alert policy makers to where adverse health effects could occur.

"Excluding health costs and benefits from these decisions may lead to policy choices that are not optimal for society," they argue.

"The health sector has a unique contribution to make to climate policies," they conclude. "Health professionals can promote greater accountability, and generate the evidence that can be used by a range of stakeholders to select policies that improve health whilst reducing [greenhouse gas emissions](#)."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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