

Climate change remains an urgent public health concern

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Top-down advocacy on health and climate at the UN level needs to be mirrored by bottom-up public health actions that bring health and climate co-benefits according to international experts writing in this week's *PLoS Medicine*.

The authors—public health experts from institutions in Sweden, Germany and South Africa—say: "It is becoming increasingly clear that maintaining a sustainable and healthy [climate](#) is something that can only be achieved by means of a concerted global effort, including large-scale and small-scale actions, in which the public health community must play an active part."

Evidence from many sectors shows substantial health impacts of [climate change](#), particularly for the most vulnerable and the authors argue that possible climate changes constitute a public health crisis at least as wide-ranging as the effects of tobacco on health. But according to the authors: "As yet there seems to be a lack of coherence in terms of clear public health messages about climate aimed at populations in general."

The authors say that there are some things that can help: "Encouraging people to walk and cycle rather than using motorised transport, and to eat healthier, locally produced foodstuffs, are clear examples that can bring both individual health benefits and reduced climate impact."

However, moving from the individual to the corporate and societal levels needs further actions. The authors say: "In general, individuals cannot

regulate their lives in terms of carbon footprint, for example, in a way that is completely independent of the societies in which they live."

The authors argue that at the global level the need for consensus actions on climate that only governments can make is equally important, but say: "public health voices must be heard on health-related issues in those circles, including lending support and influence for legislation, regulatory action, or other reform designed to address climate and environmental concerns."

They conclude: "We hope that the continuing [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change] process will nevertheless lead to an improving global prognosis—to which the [public health](#) community must contribute by effectively promoting health and climate co-benefits."

More information: Nilsson M, Evengård B, Sauerborn R, Byass P (2012) Connecting the Global Climate Change and Public Health Agendas. *PLoS Med* 9(6): e1001227. [doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001227](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001227)

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