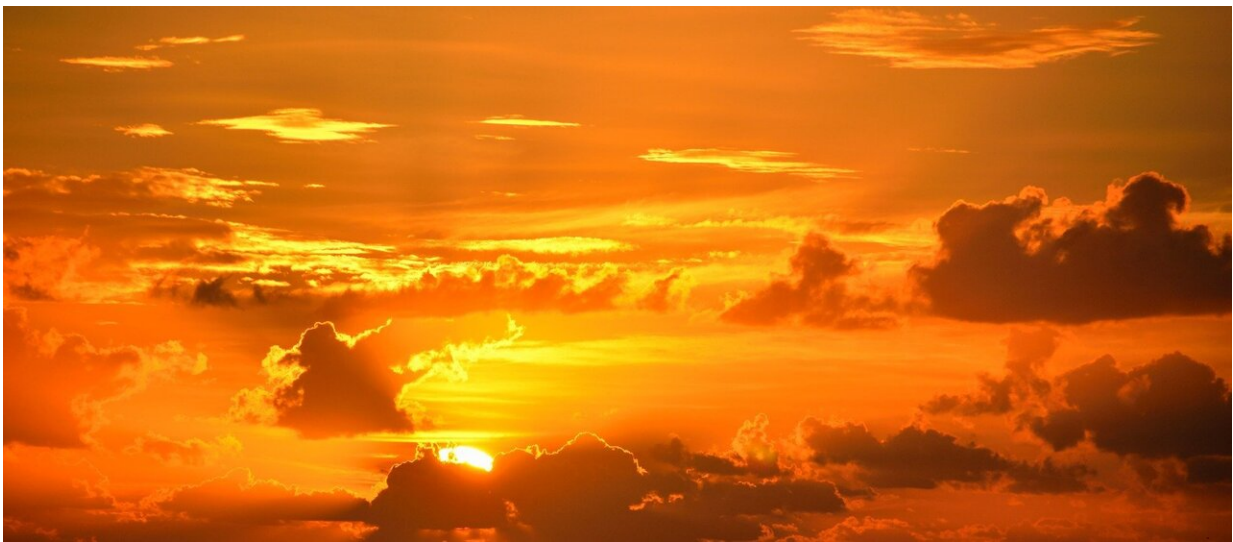


"Emergency action on climate and nature crisis cannot wait for the pandemic", says joint editorial from health journals

September 6 2021



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Today medical, nursing and public health journals across the world have simultaneously published an editorial calling for world leaders to take emergency action to transform societies and limit climate change, restore biodiversity, and protect health. The editorial will be published in over 220 leading journals, including *The Lancet*, the *East African Medical Journal*, the *Chinese Science Bulletin*, the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the *International Nursing Review*, the *National Medical*

Journal of India, The British Medical Journal, the Revista de Saúde Pública (Brazil), and the Medical Journal of Australia. Never have so many journals combined to publish the same editorial.

The [editorial](#) is being published in advance of the UN General Assembly, one of the last international meetings taking place before the (COP26) [climate](#) conference in Glasgow, UK in November. This is a crucial moment to urge all countries to deliver enhanced and ambitious climate plans to honour the goals of the Paris Agreement. In a year of COVID-19 and crucial environmental conferences, the editorial warns that the greatest threat to global public [health](#) into the future is the continued failure of [world leaders](#) to take adequate action to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5°C and to restore nature.

Current promises are not enough

For decades, [health professionals](#) and health journals have warned of the severe and growing impacts on health from [climate change](#) and the destruction of nature. Heat related mortality, [health impacts](#) from destructive weather events and the widespread degradation of ecosystems essential to human health are just a few of the impacts that we are seeing more of due to a changing climate. These impacts disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, including children and the elderly, ethnic minorities, poorer communities and those with underlying health conditions.

The editorial warns that while recent targets to reduce emissions and conserve nature are welcome, they are not enough and are yet to be matched with credible short and longer term plans. It urges governments to intervene to transform societies and economies, for example by supporting the redesign of transport systems, cities, production and distribution of food, markets for financial investments, and health systems. Such investments will produce huge positive benefits, including

high quality jobs, reduced air pollution, increased physical activity, and improved housing and diet. Better air quality alone would realise health benefits that easily offset the global costs of emissions reductions. These measures will also improve the social and economic determinants of health, the poor state of which may have made populations more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, said: "The risks posed by climate change could dwarf those of any single disease. The COVID-19 pandemic will end, but there is no vaccine for the climate crisis. The IPCC report shows that every fraction of a degree hotter endangers our health and future. Similarly, every action taken to limit emissions and warming brings us closer to a healthier and safer future."

Global cooperation hinges on wealthy nations doing more

The editorial argues that sufficient global action can only be achieved if high-income countries do far more to support the rest of the world and to reduce their own consumption. Developed countries must commit to increasing climate finance: fulfilling their outstanding commitment to provide \$100 billion a year, have a dual focus on mitigation and adaptation, including improving the resilience of health systems. Crucially, the editorial argues that this money should be provided in the form of grants, rather than loans, and should come alongside forgiving large debts, which constrain the agency of so many low-income countries. Additional funding must be marshalled to compensate for inevitable loss and damage caused by the consequences of the environmental crisis.

Any warming makes our planet more unsafe, and the recent IPCC report

shows that until the world has reached net-zero greenhouse gases the planet will continue to warm. We are already seeing these impacts globally and we already know that the consequences of the environmental crisis fall disproportionately on those countries and communities that have contributed least to the problem. A business as usual scenario would spell disaster for the planet. Governments must seize this opportunity to put forward ambitious climate goals for the sake of our health, for people worldwide and future generations.

Professor Lukoye Atwoli, Editor-in-Chief of the East Africa Medical Journal, and one of the co-authors of the editorial, said: "While low and middle income countries have historically contributed less to climate change, they bear an inordinate burden of the adverse effects, including on health. We therefore call for equitable contributions whereby the world's wealthier countries do more to offset the impact of their actions on the climate, beginning now, and continuing into the future."

Dr. Fiona Godlee, Editor-in-Chief of *The BMJ*, and one of the co-authors of the editorial, said: "Health professionals have been on the frontline of the COVID-19 crisis. And they are united in warning that going above 1.5C and allowing the continued destruction of nature will bring the next, far deadlier crisis. Wealthier nations must act faster and do more to support those countries already suffering under higher temperatures. 2021 has to be the year the world changes course—our health depends on it."

Dr. Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet*, said: "Urgently addressing the climate crisis is one of the greatest opportunities we have for advancing the wellbeing of people worldwide. The health community must do more to raise its critical voice in holding political leaders accountable for their actions to keep global temperature rises below 1.5°C."

Eric J. Rubin, M.D., Ph.D., Editor-in-Chief of *The New England Journal of Medicine*, and one of the co-authors of the editorial, said: "The environment and health are inextricably intertwined. The changing climate is endangering us in many ways, including its critical impacts on health and health care delivery. As medical and public health practitioners, we have an obligation not only to anticipate new health care needs but also to be active participants in limiting the causes of the climate crisis."

More information: Lukoye Atwoli et al, Call for emergency action to limit global temperature increases, restore biodiversity, and protect health, *The Lancet* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)01915-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01915-2)

Provided by Lancet

Citation: "Emergency action on climate and nature crisis cannot wait for the pandemic", says joint editorial from health journals (2021, September 6) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-09-emergency-action-climate-nature-crisis.html>

| |
|--|
| <p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p> |
|--|