

WONCA Action Call for COP26

The climate crisis is creating great suffering now through extreme weather, floods, fire, polluted air, food and water shortages, forced migration, aggravation of disease, and premature death. If we do not keep global temperatures within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by 2040, the suffering and deaths will increase dramatically. To avert such a catastrophe the remaining global carbon emissions budget must not exceed 520 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide. This is in keeping with the advice of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change¹ and means achieving net zero by 2040. Given our obligation to protect and promote public health and wellbeing, we call on governments, civil society, and business to take urgent action.

WONCA urges:

- All Family Medicine National Colleges and Associations to endorse and promote the pragmatic Healthy Recovery² program (already endorsed by WONCA), by August/2021, to put public health at the core of COVID-19 economic recovery.
- All Countries to endorse the World Health Organization Healthy (WHO) Recovery Manifesto.³
- All countries to set a joint and equitable plan to achieve net zero emissions by 2040⁴ with countries with high emissions of carbon, especially high-income countries, making much bigger cuts than those with low emissions.⁵
- Countries with the greatest responsibility for historic total carbon emissions (mostly high-income countries) to transfer the funds determined at the Paris Agreement to countries that are most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis, enabling them to mitigate, adapt and prepare.
- All countries to immediately end fossil fuel subsidies (while protecting the vulnerable who may be unfairly disadvantaged), coupled with carbon taxes to prioritize subsidies for massive investment in renewable energy and storage, green infrastructure, green jobs and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- All countries to immediately phase-out coal energy production.
- The World Trade Organization to implement an evidence based and equitable plan to end red meat, soy, and palm oil international commercialization from illegally deforested areas
- All fossil fuel companies to become net zero by 2040.
- The World Health Organization to implement a Sustainable Development Unit to provide evidence-based guidance to all primary health care and all health services in order to achieve net zero carbon as soon as possible and no later than 2040.

Acknowledgement

Terry Kemple and the UK Health Alliance kindly originated and collaborated with the WONCA Working Party for the Environment for this WONCA call to action. More info <http://www.ukhealthalliance.org/cop26/>

References/Notes

- 1 IPCC, 2018. Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C.
- 2 Iacobucci G. Covid-19: Public health must be "at the core" of global recovery plans, say doctors. *BMJ*. 2020 May 25;369:m2077. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m2077. PMID: 32451324.
- 3 World Health Organization (WHO) Healthy Recovery Manifesto <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/who-manifesto-for-a-healthy-recovery-from-covid-19>
- 4 The ultimate aim must be absolute zero, but net zero means that the carbon that cannot be removed by 2040 can be sequestered. Importantly only internationally validated amounts of sequestered carbon can be considered in net calculations.
- 5 The necessary actions to meet these commitments are arrived at from the concept of "Contraction and Convergence", which, as with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, is based on principles of precaution and equity. This means that to reach net zero global emissions by 2040 all countries first converge to the average global per capita emissions, then reduce to zero by 2040. A country with high carbon emissions has to make large reductions, whilst most countries with low emissions will have entitlements of increased per capita emissions initially, with all countries reaching net zero by 2040. For example the implication for a high emitting country like the UK (present average per capita emission 5.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide) is each person rapidly converging to the global average (4.8 tonnes/capita), and then reducing to zero by 2040. This further reduction has to be extremely rapid as the global share of carbon for each Briton is about 0.5 tonnes for each year between 2020 and 2040. The average British home emits 2.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year from domestic heating, and a return flight from London to New York emits 1.0 tonne of carbon dioxide. These examples illustrate the dramatic changes we need to make in how we live, eat, travel, and work to keep below a global temperature increase of 1.5°C.