

Call for climate change health funding

The World Medical Association (WMA) says human influence on the climate system is clear, with recent emissions of greenhouse gases the highest in history. Recent climate changes have had widespread impact on human and natural systems, and there's compelling evidence that this proves numerous health risks. These include more frequent and potentially more severe heatwaves, droughts, floods, storms and bushfires.



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Therefore governments need to designate funds to strengthen health systems to combat climate change. In a policy statement adopted at its annual assembly in Chicago, the WMA emphasises the urgency for taking action and for emergency planning on local, national and international levels.

“With the next United Nations conference on climate change less than a month away, it is important the voice of the world’s physicians is heard about the risks posed to health by climate change,” says Dr Yoshitake Yokokura, WMA president.

Fallout

“In our own country we have seen the impact of climate change. Parts of our country are in the grips of drought, others experience floods. As medical professionals we have to ensure we are in a position to adequately deal with the fallout from these changes, and more funding to strengthen health systems is not only necessary, it’s vital,” says Dr Mzukisi Grootboom, chairperson of South African Medical Association (Sama).

Climate change, especially warming, is already leading to changes in the environment in which disease paths flourish. There is reduced availability and quality of potable water, and worsening food insecurity leading to malnutrition and population displacement. And although climate change is universal, its effects are uneven, with many of the areas most affected the least able to manage the challenges it poses.

Those with generally the poorest health and lowest life and health expectancy will be least able to adapt to the adverse effects of climate.

Yokokura says: 'We are also urging national governments to provide for the health and wellbeing of people displaced by environmental causes, including those becoming refugees because of the consequences of climate change'.

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