

The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP  
Secretary of State for Health  
Department of Health  
79 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2NS



30 March 2016

**UK Health Alliance on Climate Change meeting request to discuss protecting and promoting the public's health by responding to climate change**

Dear Secretary of State,

We write to you today as founding members of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, which brings together Britain's major health institutions, to request a meeting with senior officials to discuss how we can work with you to improve the health of the population whilst simultaneously reducing carbon emissions, and financial burdens, by proactively anticipating and responding to climate change.

Launching this week, our aim is to encourage stronger, smarter approaches to tackling climate change that protect and promote public health, whilst also reducing the burden on health services. We are united by a shared understanding that climate change poses an unacceptable threat to the wellbeing of our patients and the British public and risks undermining the broader social determinants of health. In the same way that doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals have worked to combat the burden of disease including tobacco and obesity, the Alliance exists to ensure a robust policy response to one of the gravest threats to the health of the nation, and in particular the most vulnerable; our children, the elderly and the infirm.

For our part, the Alliance will:

- Raise awareness of the risks to health that climate change poses and the benefits that tackling it can bring;
- Support and enable doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to help the health system respond to climate change;
- Advocate at a national and international level for a strong policy response to protect and promote public health in tackling climate change, focusing on air quality, cleaner transport, household energy efficiency and sustainable diets.

We call on the Department of Health to:

- Strengthen responses to ensuring that the NHS is prepared to adapt to the health impacts of climate change.
- Recognise the importance of tackling climate change and support a cross-government approach to the issue with a specific focus on health. Almost all approaches to tackling climate change have positive impacts on health for example, healthy eating and exercise.
- Accelerate ongoing work in enabling the NHS to reduce its own carbon footprint, realising the cost-savings and benefits for patient quality of care available.

More work is urgently needed to prepare the personnel, the systems and the facilities of the NHS, as well as other institutions involved in health care, for the implications of climate change. Recent assessments suggest that only a third of NHS Providers' adaptation plans adequately integrate in to local authority planning, and only 18% of clinical commissioning groups have plans which adequately prepare their organization to respond to climate change. Indeed, over 9.5% of health care buildings in England are currently operating in flood risk zones – a number that is likely to increase under unmitigated climate change. However, there are limits to adaptation, and preventing the damage is

often better – and more cost-effective – than implementing the cure. It is time to place health firmly at the centre of the UK’s efforts to mitigate climate change. The Department of Health, with Public Health England, must act as a champion of the response to climate change, engaging with all sectors of government (including Treasury, DECC, DfT, DLCG and DEFRA) to ensure that we unlock the available benefits to wellbeing and so reduce the burden on the NHS.

In the short-term, cost-effective interventions to address many of Britain’s largest health challenges – poor diet, outdoor air pollution, physical inactivity, and obesity-related diseases – are available as part of the response to climate change. On air pollution specifically we encourage you to support DECC’s proposed commitment to phase-out unabated coal-fired power by 2025 to limit the burden on cardiopulmonary health.

We ask that you ensure government health bodies report regularly on their progress in mitigation and adaptation, in line with the Climate Change Act of 2008, the Social Values Act of 2012, and their core business of delivering a healthier population.

If we may, we will ask a representative from the Alliance to contact your office to arrange a suitable time to meet with officials. If we can be of any help, or if you require any further information in the meantime please do contact the Alliance’s Director Nick Watts on [Nick.Watts@UKHealthAlliance.org](mailto:Nick.Watts@UKHealthAlliance.org) or +447568356513.

Yours Sincerely,



Maureen Baker, Chair, Royal College of General Practitioners



Janet Davies, Chief Executive and General Secretary, Royal College of Nursing



Neena Modi, President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health



Clifford Mann, President, Royal College of Emergency Medicine



David Richmond, President, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists



Liam Brennan, President, Royal College of Anaesthetists



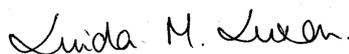
John Ashton, President, Faculty of Public Health



Babulal Sethia, President, Royal Society of Medicine



Nick Watts, Director, UK Health Alliance on Climate Change



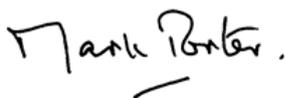
Linda Luxon, Treasurer, Royal College of Physicians



Richard Horton, Editor in chief, The Lancet



Fiona Godlee, Editor in chief, The British Medical Journal



Mark Porter, Council Chair, the British Medical Association



Robin Stott, Sue Atkinson, Co-Chairs, Climate and Health Council

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