Dear Madam or Sir,

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change welcomes the Environmental Audit Committee’s investigation into the effect of environmental damage and climate change on health. While climate change stands as the greatest health threat of the 21st century, the actions needed to halt climate change can unlock large health co-benefits. In 2016, the Alliance was formed in reaction to these profound threats and opportunities to help drive an accelerated policy response. Accordingly, the vision of the Alliance is a world in which health is improved as climate change is solved.

The Alliance’s overall approach towards planetary health is founded on a call for net-zero decarbonisation. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report made plain the need to limit temperature rises to 1.5C and, in order to do so, bring greenhouse gas emissions to ‘net zero’ globally by 2050. The Alliance has called on the UK government to commit to playing its part in limiting temperature rise to 1.5C, by setting a target for reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions before 2050. This is a view held by the vast majority of healthcare professionals, with a recent poll from YouGov commissioned by the Alliance showing that 79% of healthcare professionals support the UK adopting an aim to cut its carbon emissions to zero in the next few decades.¹

The Alliance exists to coordinate and support health professionals in grasping this agenda, seeking to firmly position health in the climate change agenda in the minds of health professionals, patients, and national policymakers and politicians. Since its establishment, the Alliance has successfully established itself as the UK authority on the links between health and climate change, with membership including Medical and Nursing Royal Colleges, Faculties, the British Medical Association, the British Medical Journal, and The Lancet, and is well placed to continue to coordinate the health professions’ response over the coming years.

Context
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes that the “warming of the climate system is unequivocal”, and that “man’s influence on the climate is clear”. Anthropogenic disruption to climate systems interact with worsening air pollution, ocean acidification, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and other forms of environmental degradation to undermine the foundations of good health. As such, the World Health Organisation has described climate change as “the defining health challenge of our time”. The health impacts of climate change are being experienced today and will prove catastrophic if left unabated.

These effects can be direct, including an increase in frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as flood, drought, extreme storms and heatwaves. Or indirect, eroding the conditions upon which good health can occur, such as the spread of vector borne diseases including malaria and dengue, malnutrition and famine resulting from decreased agricultural productivity and worsening water security, rising sea levels and subsequent population displacement; and an exacerbation of poverty and social unrest. These health impacts have been summarized and studied extensively by the IPCC’s second working

¹ Health professionals call on prime minister to cut greenhouse gases to net-zero before 2050’, UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, https://bit.ly/2RSv8RP
group and by the 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change.

Crucially, many of the drivers of climate change – fossil fuels, over-consumption, and poorly designed cities – also cause ill health directly, through air pollution, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity. Hence, by responding to climate change, we can simultaneously address these health challenges, often making climate change mitigation policies cost-effective and sensible public health interventions. Similarly, health system strengthening and improved community health is one of the most effective adaptation strategies to minimise the harm caused by climate change. In considering the sum of these co-benefits, the 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change to conclude that “responding to climate change could be the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century”.

Securing future health depends on embedding actions on mitigating climate change and embedding the principles of sustainable development into all that we do, as health organisations, as health professionals, and as citizens. There is clear and widely accepted evidence that inaction by health professionals and the government is unacceptable. The science is clear; the legal and implementation frameworks are becoming aligned; a national cross system strategy exists; the multiple benefits for health are profound; yet time is running out.

Policy recommendations
Looking internationally, the Alliance supports the eight recommendations of the 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change, namely;

1. Investment in climate change and public health research
2. Scale-up of financing for climate-resilient health systems
3. Phase-out coal-fired power
4. Encouragement of city-level low-carbon
5. Transition to reduce urban pollution
6. Rapid expansion of access to renewable energy, unlocking the substantial economic gains available from this transition
7. Agreement and implementation of an international treaty that facilitates the transition to a low-carbon economy
8. Development of a new, independent collaboration to provide expertise in implementing policies that mitigate climate change and promote public health, and monitor progress over the next 15 years

Good progress has been made towards these recommendations, but there remains much to be done. Details of the progress towards these recommendations can be found in the 2018

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4 See, for example, the 2008 UK Climate Change Act; the 2012 Public Services (Social Value Act); the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act; the UK National Extreme Events Plans


report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change. The Countdown monitors progress on health and climate change, and provides an independent assessment of the health effects of climate change, the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and the health implications of these actions.

At the national level, the Alliance develops policy responses that protect and promote public health, mitigate climate change and improve environmental conditions upon which public health depends on. Most importantly, the Alliance focuses on areas where policy can make the most progress towards the UK having net-zero emissions, in the shortest possible time while maximising the health benefits of doing so.

We know that actions to mitigate climate change can also be those that improve health, beyond reductions in climate change-induced ill health. These are health benefits that could have been realised even without the climate change threat; this threat should act as a final impetus to realise these health benefits. The Alliance has identified three priority areas where action on climate change can deliver an immediate and direct improvement in UK public health: air quality, active transport and sustainable diets.

**Air Quality**

Air quality is a key issue for the Alliance and its members. This is because of the large negative health impacts of air pollution, which range from asthma to diabetes, and have an estimated mortality impact of up to 40,000 deaths a year. Estimates of the resultant costs to society and the economy exceed £22 billion. In turn, actions to limit air pollution not only reduce the burden of poor air, but can improve general well-being through increases in physical activity and by helping to mitigate climate change. Our latest policy recommendations in this area can be found in our report, Moving Beyond the Air Quality Crisis. Our main policy recommendations are:

1. **NewCAA**
2. **Who limits**
3. **Advisory body**
4. **Ban**

**Active Transport**

The need to encourage individuals to participate in physical activity has never been greater. Over half the population do not reach a healthy level of activity, with wide variations between groups, sufficient to cause ill health. Analyses have concluded

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9 Every breath we take: the lifelong impact of air pollution [2016], Royal College of Physicians [https://bit.ly/1PUBD09](https://bit.ly/1PUBD09)

10 Reducing air pollution in the UK: Progress report 2018, Royal College of Physicians, London. [https://bit.ly/2IMZg0g](https://bit.ly/2IMZg0g)

11 UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (2018), Moving Beyond the Air Quality Crisis. [https://bit.ly/2z7tgMI](https://bit.ly/2z7tgMI)

that the cost of this inactivity in the UK is over £20 billion a year. There are greater intangible costs too - in the UK, lack of physical activity is acknowledged as one of the top four factors responsible for premature deaths and long term diseases (alongside smoking, alcohol and poor nutrition), and also as a key mechanism for large inequalities in health. Active travel promotion is incredibly beneficial for our health and our environment; by encouraging a shift away from polluting and unsustainable transport, as well as the benefits that come from improvements in health, including savings to the public purse and happier communities. Our most recent active travel policy recommendations can also be found in our report, Moving Beyond the Air Quality Crisis.

Sustainable diets
There are local and global implications for the environmental and social impacts of the food we produce and consume. 20% of global carbon emissions are from agriculture and food, and agriculture is the biggest driver of deforestation and associated biodiversity loss across the world. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous paragraph, nationally we have an obesity crisis. Therefore, the Alliance has recognised the food system as an area that needs addressing if we are to meet our Paris commitments, as well as an area where big health co-benefits can be unlocked.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We would be keen to be a key stakeholder in the ongoing development of this inquiry, and welcome a meeting to discuss this and our submission further.

Yours faithfully,
The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change
http://www.ukhealthalliance.org/


18 UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (2018), Moving Beyond the Air Quality Crisis. https://bit.ly/2r7IgMI