UKHACC response to
Committee on Climate Change report on net-zero

2nd May 2019

As representatives of over 650,000 health professionals across the UK, the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, warmly welcome the recommendations put forward in today’s report from the Committee on Climate Change, and call on the Government to take action as soon as possible to adopt them. Any delay will put the health of the nation at risk. The contents of the report prove it is feasible and credible to set a target for reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and we must continue the momentum by planning for these actions across Government now. This is a view held by the vast majority of doctors and nurses 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.

We echo the call for this target to be embedded across Government departments, and expect to see the Department for Health and Social Care playing a leading role. Furthermore, we are pleased that the report calls for a switch to electric vehicles by 2035, as transport is a major sector where action on climate change unlocks significant benefits for health. The net zero by 2050 target will mean the UK ends its contribution to temperature rise, and we welcome the fact that this is a 1.5 degree compliant recommendation, aligning the UK with the advice in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s landmark report last year. Having just celebrated ten successful years of the Climate Change Act, now is the right time for the UK to commit to taking action to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, and so we call on the Government to adopt the CCC’s recommendations and adopt a net-zero target sooner rather than later and before 2050.

The World Health Organisation has described climate change as the “greatest threat to global health in the 21st century”. The exceptional heat in the UK last summer reminds us of the challenges a changing climate poses to the health of British people, particularly the most vulnerable, the young and the elderly.

Last November, the Lancet Countdown, a global, interdisciplinary research collaboration on the links between climate change and health, published a new report warning of the growing negative health impacts of climate change.

in the UK and around the world. In particular, threats to health from increasing heat are becoming more frequent and more dangerous. Heatwaves are associated with increased rates of heat stress and heat stroke, exacerbations of heart failure, and acute kidney injury from dehydration. Previous heatwaves have taken a toll: the 2003 heatwave, for example, resulted in an additional 2,000 deaths in the UK.²

Action on climate change presents a profound opportunity to improve health as many of the drivers of climate change – fossil fuels, over-consumption, and poorly designed cities – also cause ill health themselves, through air pollution, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity.³ We therefore also call on the government to enshrine a principle of maximising the health benefits of reaching net zero, through, for example, increases in active transport, healthier diets, and reductions in air pollution. We offer our assistance in understanding and developing responses to climate change that maximise health benefits.

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change represents the UK’s major health institutions, including Medical and Nursing Royal Colleges, Faculties, the BMA, The BMJ and The Lancet. 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.

For any questions or queries about this UK Health Alliance on Climate Change statement, or to discuss it further, please contact the Alliance’s Policy and Public Affairs Manager Antonia Jennings at antonia.jennings@ukhealthalliance.org.
