



UK HEALTH
ALLIANCE ON
CLIMATE CHANGE

Health professionals call for action to avert a climate catastrophe

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, an international collaboration of health professionals, call on governments, civil society, and business to take urgent action that will:

- Rapidly decarbonise the world economy
- Support and protect vulnerable populations
- Enhance biodiversity and regenerative agriculture
- Help people, economies, and the environment adapt and prepare for the impacts of climate change

We call for:

- All countries to achieve net zero emissions² by 2040 with countries with high emissions of carbon making much bigger cuts than those with low emissions³
- Countries with the greatest responsibility for carbon emissions (mostly high income countries) to transfer funds to countries that are most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis, enabling them to adapt and prepare
- All fossil fuel subsidies to end (while protecting the vulnerable who may be unfairly disadvantaged) coupled with a massive investment in renewable energy and storage, green infrastructure, and green jobs
- All fossil fuel companies to become net zero by 2040
- All health services to become net zero as soon as possible and before 2040

¹ IPCC, 2018. Special Report: [Global Warming of 1.5°C](#).

² 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.

³ 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 and the UK Climate Act, 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. Those countries with high carbon emissions have 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.

The implication for a high emitting country like Britain (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.