

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

12. Climate change

12.9 Climate change and health



Health, climate change and poverty

The Department of Health identifies a number of negative health effects that are likely to worsen with climate change. Those in poverty and suffering from existing ill health are most vulnerable to all these effects, which include:

- Heat-related deaths will increase and possibly by around 2800 cases per year.
- Cases of food poisoning are likely to increase significantly, by approximately 10,000 cases per year in the UK.
- Insect-related problems, such as diarrhoeal diseases spread by flies, will increase.
- Skin cancer cases are likely to increase by perhaps 5000 per year and cataracts cases by 2000 per year in the UK by 2050.
- Injuries, infectious diseases, anxiety and depression are all linked to serious flooding and these are likely to increase.
- Respiratory allergies will increase due to increased mould growth in housing caused by more humid winters.

The negative impacts of climate change on human health are of particular significance to those living in poverty. The lowest income bands already experience a higher burden of illness due to a number of factors including: low wages, occupational stress, unemployment, inadequate housing, poor nutrition, poor education, limited access to health care, transport and shops, lack of recreation facilities, and exposure to air pollution. This leaves the poorest in society more exposed to the negative effects of climate change on health.

There are many reports that outline the effects climate change will have on the health of people across the world. Evidence presented by bodies such as the 2010 Marmot Review into health inequalities and the 2009 Global Humanitarian Report pointed out the significant impacts of climate change on issues such as health and well-being, especially for the most vulnerable. For further reading take a look at:

World Health Organization

WHO/Europe works to identify policy options to help prevent, prepare for and respond to the health effects of these changes, and supports its Member States in selecting and implementing the most suitable strategies. Their publication *Protecting health in an environment challenged by climate change: European Regional Framework for Action*

aims to prevent and reduce the health effects of climate change through strengthening health systems, helping them to adapt, and building institutional capacity.

www.who.int/globalchange/publications/9789241598187/en/index.html

Lancet and University College London Institute for Global Health Commission - Managing the health effects of climate change

A collaboration between The Lancet and University College London, UK, resulting in the first UCL Lancet Commission report, setting out how climate change over the coming decades could have a disastrous effect on health across the globe. The report examines practical measures that can be taken now and in the short and medium term to control its effects.

www.ucl.ac.uk/global-health/ucl-lancet-climate-change.pdf

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: The social justice implications of climate change in the UK

This programme supports the development of socially just responses to climate change in the UK. Those vulnerable to impacts of climate change include those who suffer from ill health and reduced mobility. This programme explore these issues from a number of perspectives, including [Vulnerability to heatwaves and drought: adaptation to climate change](#)

www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/climate-change-and-social-justice

The Welsh Government in particular has recognised that Climate Change is a cross cutting issue and health is one of the areas in which the impact of climate change has been recognised.

The Climate Change Strategy for Wales - Adaptation Delivery Plan sets out the specific policies and programmes that the Welsh Government expects to implement in delivering the Adaptation Framework. One of the main categories is health

www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-guide-docs-pub/bus-business-documents/bus-business-documents-doc-laid/gen-ld8256-e.pdf?langoption=3&ttl=GEN-LD8256%20-%20Climate%20Change%20Strategy%20for%20Wales%20-%20Adaptation%20Delivery%20Plan

The Welsh Government's Climate Change and Health Working Group report highlights some of the main impacts of climate change on the health sector.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/protection/environmental/publications/climate/?lang=en>

Heatwave Plan for Wales 2009: A Framework for Preparedness and Response

This plan sets out arrangements to alert appropriate health, social and other care agencies and members of the public (especially vulnerable groups) to the dangers of excessive heat.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/protection/environmental/publications/heatwave/?lang=en>

The Welsh Government has a series of leaflets for different groups (including information for health and social care providers and advice for care home staff) about what they should do in a heat wave event.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/protection/environmental/publications/professionals1/?lang=en>

An article from the **Health Protection Agency** presents the links between Climate Change and health from a health perspective.

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_080702

Many Local Authorities are now looking at the impacts of climate change on their health and social care services. Herefordshire has taken a combined snapshot of the County Council and the NHS across the county. Find out more at:

www.hertsdirect.org/infobase/docs/pdfstore/nhsacsstudy1.pdf

The Carbon Addict is a humorous, cartoon based website that cites the symptoms, behaviours, diagnosis and management of 'carbon dependence syndrome' – i.e. the consequences and complications of living a high carbon lifestyle. The website is targeted at health care professionals and written in language familiar to them. It aims to get people thinking about the links between health and climate change and to signpost them to the evidence underpinning the links. More broadly, it aims to encourage students and clinicians to use the knowledge in clinical practice, dedicating more time to supporting patients in making lifestyle changes that benefit their health and the environment.

www.carbonaddict.org

However a much broader range of organisations needs to be engaged in work to tackle climate change, bringing with them skills in policy influencing and the authority of their staff, beneficiaries and supporters.

Third Sector

Read about the work of **Friends of the Elderly**, **RNIB**, **British Red Cross** and **Equinox** as part of NCVO'S Big Project which explore the health impacts on the beneficiaries they support:

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/thebigresponse

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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