

Climate Action Simulation: Health Advocates



To: Chief Negotiators for the Health Sector
Subject: Preparation for the Climate Action Summit

Welcome to the Climate Action Summit. You and leaders from all relevant stakeholders have been invited by the UN Secretary-General to work together to successfully address climate change. In the invitation, the Secretary-General [noted](#) that: “The climate emergency is a race we are losing, but it is a race we can win...The best science...tells us that any temperature rise above 1.5°C will lead to major and irreversible damage to the ecosystems that support us...But science also tells us it is not too late. We can do it...But it will require fundamental transformations in all aspects of society—how we grow food, use land, fuel our transport and power our economies...By acting together, we will leave no one behind.”

The goal of the summit is to create a plan to limit global warming to less than 2°C [3.6°F] above pre-industrial levels and to strive for 1.5°C [2.7°F], the international targets formally recognized in the Paris Climate Agreement. The [scientific evidence](#) is clear: warming above this limit will yield catastrophic and irreversible impacts threatening the health, prosperity, and lives of people in all nations.

Your group includes doctors, nurses, allied healthcare professionals, public health leaders, community health workers, medical researchers, global health non-governmental organizations (NGOs), hospitals, and government health systems. Your group represents those who care for the billions of people already experiencing the consequences of climate change—from deadly heatwaves and wildfire smoke-induced asthma to malnutrition and the spread of infectious disease.

Your policy priorities are listed below. You can, however, propose, or block, any available policy.

- 1. Urgently end fossil fuel use to save lives.** Air pollution from burning fossil fuels is responsible for millions of deaths each year—estimates range from 2.5 million to over 5 million deaths per year.^{1,2} Burning coal is particularly toxic, causing 1 million deaths per year.¹ Fossil fuel subsidies keep polluting fuels artificially cheap, slow the transition to clean energy, and pass the health consequences on to the public. Every \$1 spent on fossil fuel subsidies creates an estimated \$6 in health-related costs.³ Ending these subsidies must be the first priority, followed by strong measures such as taxation or carbon pricing to make polluters pay their true environmental and health costs and accelerate the shift to cleaner alternatives. Proposals to continue fossil fuel use by removing CO₂ at the smokestack (carbon capture and storage, or CCS), do not address air pollution and other harms caused by fossil fuels and are not a substitute for phasing them out.
- 2. Encourage plant-based food and sustainable agriculture.** Shifting to more plant-based food

¹ Romanello, M., et al. (2025). [The 2025 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change](#). *The Lancet*.

² Lelieveld, J., et al. (2023). [Air pollution deaths attributable to fossil fuels: observational and modelling study](#). *BMJ*, 383, e077784.

³ Global Climate and Health Alliance. (2025). [Cradle to Grave: The health toll of fossil fuels and the imperative for a just transition](#).

lowers the risk of heart disease and cancer, while also cutting methane emissions from livestock.⁴ In 2022, an estimated 1.9 million deaths were due to red meat and dairy.¹ Producing less food from animals also reduces the need for farmland, helping to prevent deforestation, which is a major driver of greenhouse gas emissions.

3. **Support energy efficiency and electrification of transport.** Invest in public transport, walking, and cycling infrastructure. These options reduce emissions, improve air quality, increase physical activity and mental wellbeing, and reduce traffic injuries. At the same time, expand investment in electric vehicles to replace gasoline and diesel vehicles, which release dangerous pollutants like carbon monoxide, soot, and nitrogen oxides. Communities near highways—often already disadvantaged—face the worst impacts of this pollution.
4. **Deploy renewable energy and energy storage to strengthen resilience.** Hospitals, clinics, and other essential services rely on uninterrupted power, yet blackouts from storms, heat waves, and other crises are becoming more frequent, putting vulnerable patients at risk. Roughly 1 billion people worldwide are served by healthcare facilities that face intermittent or unreliable power. Local renewable systems—such as microgrids or rooftop solar with batteries—can improve patient care and maintain operations even during extreme weather events or supply chain disruptions.
5. **Promote electrification of buildings and reduce bioenergy.** Expanding access to affordable, clean electricity has major health benefits. Indoor air pollution from cooking and heating with solid fuels like wood and dung causes respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, resulting in over 3 million deaths in 2021.⁵ Fuel collection often falls on women and children, who often walk long distances in unsafe conditions to gather wood. Discourage wood pellet production and other bioenergy sources that emit harmful pollutants in surrounding communities and contribute to deforestation.⁶

Additional Considerations

The health impacts of climate change are immediate and severe. Extreme heat increasingly threatens productivity by limiting people's ability to work outdoors or in buildings without adequate cooling. Extreme weather, air pollution, and changing patterns of infectious disease already place huge burdens on health systems. They threaten millions of lives, especially among vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and the poor. Those who have contributed least to global emissions face the greatest risks.

The health sector itself accounts for about 5% of global emissions and must decarbonize as part of this transition. Hospitals and clinics can adopt energy-efficient systems, shift to renewable energy, and rethink operations—from how staff and patients travel to how supplies are sourced and waste is managed. At the same time, they can strengthen resilience to extreme heat, severe storms, and the spread of diseases like malaria and dengue, ensuring care continues during crises.

Addressing climate change is not just an environmental necessity—it is a public health imperative. Transitioning to clean energy, reducing reliance on polluting fuels, expanding access to safe cooking technologies, and promoting sustainable food systems can prevent millions of premature deaths, reduce chronic disease, and improve quality of life. These actions also deliver economic benefits, including lower healthcare costs and higher worker productivity. Human health is the strongest and most urgent reason to act on climate change.

⁴ Rockström, J., et al. (2025). [The EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy, sustainable, and just food systems](#). *The Lancet*.

⁵ Bennitt, F. B., et al. (2025). [Global, regional, and national burden of household air pollution, 1990–2021: A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021](#). *The Lancet*, 405(10485), 1167–1181.

⁶ Tran, H., Juno, E., & Arunachalam, S. (2023). [Emissions of wood pelletization and bioenergy use in the United States](#). *Renewable Energy*, 219(2), 119536.