WHO WORKPLAN ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES: 2014-2019

Endorsed by the Executive Board of the World Health Organization at its 136th Session, February 2015.

Workplan aims

The workplan will provide support to Member States: to respond to the health risks presented by climate change, by strengthening the resilience of health systems to climate risks and improving their capacity to adapt to long-term climate changes; and to identify, assess and promote actions that reduce the burden of diseases associated with air pollution, and other health consequences of policies that also cause climate change.

WHO will implement the workplan with a particular focus on promoting health equity. It will take into account variation in the vulnerability of populations to climate risks, and in their capacity to respond, both of which are associated with gender and other social determinants of health. The workplan will focus in particular on improving the health of the most vulnerable population groups, including the poor, children and the elderly. Its implementation will be in line with the Twelfth General Programme of Work 2014-2019.

The main changes from the previous (2009-2014) workplan are (i) establishment of a partnership “platform” to respond to the increasing number of activities and actors engaged in this field; (ii) greater emphasis on actions that can improve health while also mitigating the extent of climate change; and (iii) promoting the need and providing tools for more systematic provision of country-specific information and monitoring of progress.

Objective 1. Strengthen partnerships to support health and climate within and outside the United Nations system

Action 1.1 Establish a stable partnership platform to enable WHO to work with other organizations that have complementary capacities (for example, nongovernmental organizations on awareness raising, collaborating centres on research, and development banks on financing). This action will support and build on existing partnerships on specific issues, including formalizing the WMO/WMO Climate and Health Office; strengthening engagement with the Global Framework for Climate Services and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants; and developing new partnerships for specific thematic areas, such as the linkages between climate change, health, water and sanitation, and nutrition.

Action 1.2 Continue to provide leadership on health throughout the system-wide response of the United Nations to climate change. Particular attention will be given to ensuring that health is appropriately reflected in policy and planning processes, and financial support mechanisms under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals currently being discussed.
Objective 2. Awareness raising

Action 2.1 Develop tools, guidance, information and training packages for raising awareness of the links between health and climate, and the potential for enhancing health through mitigation of the extent of climate change. The focus will be on supporting national health decision-makers to engage effectively on setting policies for adaptation and mitigation, for example in negotiations being carried out under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Action 2.2 Further develop WHO’s networks and mechanisms for disseminating information to the wider community of health professionals, and the general public, working particularly with nongovernmental organizations, youth groups, and other relevant partners.

Objective 3. Promote and guide the generation of scientific evidence

Action 3.1 Monitor and guide research agendas. This action will include the formulation of mechanisms to support exchange between researchers and decision-makers, definition of regional and national research agendas on climate change and health, and monitoring the extent to which research output is responsive to the priorities identified by the Health Assembly in resolution WHA61.19.

Action 3.2. Lead, or contribute to, international assessments of the risks to health from climate change and of the benefits to health of mitigation policies, in collaboration with other partners, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Action 3.3. Further develop and support the use of tools for Member States to assess the effectiveness of interventions to increase resilience to climate change, and the health impacts of adaptation and mitigation decisions in other sectors. These evaluations should include assessment of economic consequences and wider sustainable-development implications, including the cost-effectiveness of interventions; the costs of inaction; and health benefits from mitigation and adaptation policies.

Action 3.4. Produce and systematically maintain country-specific profiles, including hazards, vulnerabilities and projected impacts, as well as the potential for health gains from health-promoting interventions to increase resilience and mitigate the extent of climate change.

Objective 4. Provide policy and technical support to the implementation of the public health response to climate change

Action 4.1 Support a more systematic approach to increasing the resilience of public health systems to climate, by providing an operational framework that identifies health functions that should be strengthened and that should take account of climate risks. This action would encompass public health interventions within the formal health sector, and cross-sectoral action to improve the environmental and social determinants of health, ranging from improved air quality and wider access to clean water and sanitation to enhanced disaster preparedness.
Action 4.2 Support capacity-building through the setting of norms and standards, development of technical guidance, and training courses. This action will include key areas such as the use of information on climate to improve disease surveillance and early warning; enhanced health preparedness for and response to extreme weather events; and opportunities to simultaneously tackle climate change and air pollution.

Action 4.3 Implement pilot projects to test new approaches. These activities will be supported by a clear strategy for expansion and mainstreaming into policies, plans and programmes of health and health-determining sectors, such as water and sanitation, agriculture and energy provision.

Action 4.4 Provide specific policy and technical support on health facilities, including: ensuring resilience to climate change risks; provision of environmental services, including access to electricity, clean water and sanitation, and waste management; and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from health sector operations.

Action 4.5 Provide guidance and technical support to Member States for accessing financial resources to enhance health protection from climate change risks, and valuation of health benefits in cross-sectoral policies. The Secretariat will serve as a clearing house for funding opportunities, and provide support through advocacy, monitoring and dissemination of evidence in order to ensure appropriate access and share of resources for health.

Action 4.6 Establish a voluntary system for countries to report their progress in increasing the resilience of health systems to climate change and gaining health benefits from mitigation policies, using an agreed set of indicators. This action will also provide a systematic and objective basis for reporting to WHO’s governing bodies.