First WHO Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health: Improving air quality, combatting climate change – saving lives

Pre-Conference Workshop

**A deep dive workshop: The importance of sustainable energy to delivering quality health services**

Co-Organized by WHO and United Nations Foundation (UNF)
Monday 29 October 2018, 16:30-18:00
World Health Organization, Geneva - Salle A

**Background**

Our energy choices have important impacts on our health. They influence the amount of harmful air pollution people breath and help determine the risks we face from climate change. But, for the 1 billion people who lack access to any form of modern energy, they also affect the quality of health care people depend on.

Energy is critical for the delivery of health services, particularly for vulnerable populations such as women and children. When health facilities have sufficient and reliable power, women can more safely give birth at night and during emergencies, medical equipment can be powered and better sterilized and clinics can preserve life-saving vaccines for newborns and children.

Yet, despite electricity’s importance to delivering health services, it is estimated that tens of thousands of health centers across low- and middle-income countries are not connected to an electric grid. As a result, many health facilities depend on expensive, polluting and inadequate alternatives such as diesel generators or kerosene lamps. A similar number of hospitals suffer from frequent and debilitating blackouts. This helps explains why infrastructure – including electricity – is the main driver behind the additional $274 billion in spending needed per year by 2030 to make progress towards SDG 3 (healthy lives and wellbeing).\(^1\) And yet closing this access gap by 2030 won’t be possible through business-as-usual approaches (e.g. grid extension).

Heightened political attention and commitment to universal health coverage, coupled with recent advances in clean energy and the impetus for climate action, present a timely opportunity to improve access to quality health care while greening health facilities and making them more climate-resilient. If, for example, a portion of the attention/resources being marshalled to accelerate the delivery of decentralized, renewable energy solutions and energy efficiency measures could be directed towards healthcare infrastructure, the benefit to health systems, and the communities they serve, would be significant.

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However, increasing access to reliable and modern energy in health facilities doesn’t come without challenges. Chief among them is the lack of available data/information about the intersection between energy and health care. Reliable data on energy access in health facilities, for example is currently sparse. A comprehensive literature review conducted by Duke University’s Sustainable Energy Transitions Initiative concluded that energy in health facilities is one of the least researched and understood issues within the broader energy and development field. This lack of data results in low levels of awareness of and priority given to energy and health care.

**Objective**

On the occasion of WHO’s first Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health, WHO in collaboration with the United Nations Foundation is hosting a deep dive workshop to raise awareness among policy makers about the need and opportunity to provide better health services and reduce air pollution by investing in sustainable energy infrastructure for health facilities in developing countries.

**Programme**

- **Opening Remarks:** Jem Porcaro, United Nations Foundation (5min)

- **The Role of Sustainable Energy as an Enabler of SDG 3 (UHC, MNCH): Setting the Scene** (10min)
  - Heather Adair-Rohani, WHO

- **The Impact of Access to Electricity on Service Delivery: The Evidence Base** (40 min) **Moderator:** Heather Adair-Rohani, WHO
  - Robert Fetter, Duke Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions (5min)
  - Dena Javadi, WHO’s Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (to discuss preliminary findings from their Uganda/Ghana study) (8min)
  - Saleban Omar, Senior Regional Programme Advisor, UNDP (Overview UNDP S4H and Country Case study) (8min)
  - Laura Stachel, We Care Solar (to discuss the design of their RCT studies in Liberia and Uganda) (8min)
  - Q&A (10min)

- **What Evidence is Needed to Drive Investment in Health Facility Electrification? A Roundtable Discussion** (30 min) **Moderator:** Jem Porcaro, United Nations Foundation
  - Caroline McGregor, Lead Energy Access and Gender Specialist, Sustainable Energy for All
  - Rachita Misra, SELCO Foundation, India
  - Robert Fetter, Duke Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions
  - Dena Javadi, WHO’s Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research
  - Saleban Omar, Senior Regional Programme Advisor, UNDP
  - Laura Stachel, We Care Solar

- **Closing Remarks:** Heather Adair-Rohani, WHO (5min)