

## Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health

The 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change has been formed to map out the impacts of climate change, and the necessary policy responses, in order to ensure the highest attainable standards of health for populations worldwide. This Commission is multidisciplinary and international in nature, with strong collaboration between academic centres in Europe and China. **The central finding from the Commission's work is that tackling climate change could be the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century.** The key messages of the Commission are summarised below:

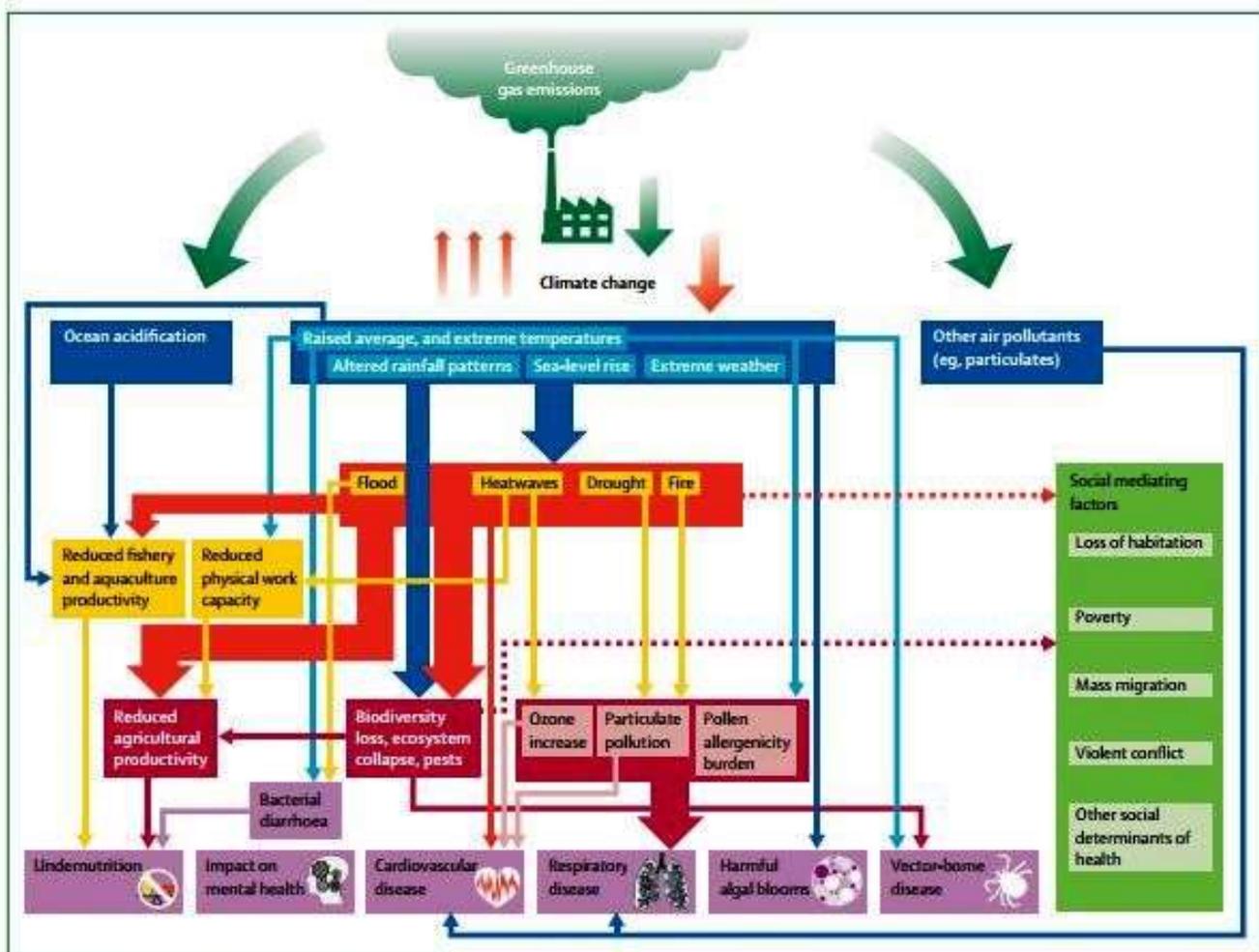


Figure 1: An overview of the links between greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, and health

- The effects of climate change are being felt today, and future projections represent an unacceptably high and potentially catastrophic risk to human health.** The implications of climate change for a global population of 9 billion people threatens to undermine the last half century of gains in development and global health. The direct effects of climate change include increased heat stress, floods, drought, and increased frequency of intense storms, with the indirect threatening population health through adverse changes in air pollution, the spread of disease vectors, insecurity and under-nutrition, displacement, and mental ill health.
- Tackling climate change could be the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century** Given the potential of climate change to reverse the health gains from economic development, and the health co-benefits that accrue from actions for a sustainable economy, tackling climate change could be the greatest global health opportunity of this

**century.** Many mitigation and adaptation responses to climate change are “no-regret” options, which lead to direct reductions in the burden of ill-health, enhance community resilience, alleviate poverty, and address global inequity.

3. **Achieving a decarbonised global economy and securing the public health benefits it offers is no longer primarily a technical or economic question—it is now a political one.** Major technical advances have made buildings and vehicles more efficient and renewable energy sources far more cost effective. Globally, there is plentiful financial resource available, however much of it is still being directed towards the fossil-fuel industry. Bold political commitment can ensure that the technical expertise, technology, and finance to prevent further significant climate change is readily available, and is not a barrier to action.

4. **The health community has a vital part to play in accelerating progress to tackle climate change Health professionals have worked to protect against health threats, such as tobacco, HIV/AIDS, and polio, and have often confronted powerful entrenched interests in doing so. Likewise, they must be leaders in responding to the health threat of climate change.** A public health perspective has the potential to unite all actors behind a common cause—the health and wellbeing of our families, communities, and countries. These concepts are far more tangible and visceral than tonnes of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, and are understood and prioritised across all populations irrespective of culture or development status. Reducing inequities within and between countries

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