

Position statement: Climate Change, 2016

Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to provide a guide for NZNO to act on climate change as a global and national issue with important implications for society and health. Action on climate change is also action to improve and secure human health and quality of life; 'Healthy people, healthy planet'. The statement also provides links to resources to empower all NZNO members to support their communities and patients and advocate for national and international change to effect healthy public policy.

Introduction/Background

Climate change will affect everyone, but not equally. It is clear the world is beginning to experience more extreme weather events, changes to agricultural sustainability, rising sea levels and threats to all systems in the biosphere including human health. Richer, developed countries including New Zealand have contributed most to damaging activities, while the negative impacts of climate change fall disproportionately on the least developed countries and the poorest citizens, further exacerbating inequalities. The systems which sustain all society and life on earth are undeniably at risk.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) calls climate change the greatest threat to human health this century, but also calls it the greatest opportunity to improve human health. This combination of risk and opportunities has meant an unprecedented response from many national and international health organisations including the WHO, the Centre for Disease Control, the International Council of Nurses (ICN), and the New Zealand Medical Association. All call for political, organisational and personal action to limit and mitigate against further harm, and improve peoples' quality of life. The ICN calls on health organisations including national nursing associations to pledge action for the sake of public health and the impact of climate change.

Climate change is also a social justice issue, where the costs and benefits of transition to a climate-supporting society need to be weighed and distributed fairly. This includes the need for economically, environmentally and socially sustainable employment for everyone, as we move towards a low carbon economy. NZNO supports the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and many other union bodies in calling for a 'just transition' to a climate-supporting society with decent jobs.

NZNO endorses [the New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine position statement on climate change](#). It is a thorough, well-researched and a comprehensive account of the evidence for global climate change and its health impacts, on the actions required to prevent and reduce harm to health from climate change, and the role and responsibility of public health medicine. NZNO makes the following nursing-specific statements:

Nursing and climate change

- > NZNO commits to collaboration with other health professions to lobby for government ratification of enforceable climate change treaties, and to meaningful action to reduce New Zealand's contribution to global warming, including a substantial reduction in gross domestic emissions, an end to fossil-fuel subsidies, and a moratorium on deep sea oil drilling and fracking.
- > Nurses recognise the carbon-based economy poses a serious threat to the biosphere, human society and health, and that moving towards a safe-energy economy has significant personal and public health benefits.
- > NZNO calls for mandatory health impact assessments of all aspects of government and public policy to determine the impact of climate change.
- > Nurses assert our role and responsibility to contribute to the development of national action plans and policies, and to be part of disaster preparedness to mitigate the impact of climate change on health, and to support to calls for humanitarian assistance wherever health is adversely affected by climate change – especially from our Pacific neighbours.
- > We call for well-designed and resourced public transport and safe walking and cycling routes – developments that, in addition to reducing carbon emissions, would also produce significant health gains.
- > We agree that healthy public policy on sustainable, energy efficient housing and urban planning which, in addition to reducing emissions, have the potential to reduce the burden of disease and save energy costs in our poorest families.
- > Nurses also advocate specifically for the introduction and enactment of public policies related to reversing the widening deprivation and income gap in Aotearoa New Zealand, which is inextricably linked to health inequalities.
- > NZNO acknowledges the knowledge, customs and practices of tāngata whenua and indigenous peoples relating to the protection of the environment.
- > We commit to informing and enacting strategies to increase the environmental sustainability of health care, and to reduce waste.
- > At an organisational level, we commit to undertake steps to reduce and mitigate our contribution to carbon emissions, including stopping investment in fossil fuels.

Resources

World Health Organisation briefing sheets for health professionals

<http://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/didyouknow-health-professionals.pdf?ua=1>

The New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine Position Statement on Climate Change

http://www.nzcphm.org.nz/media/74098/1._nzcphm_climate_change_policy__final_comms_version_2_.pdf

Centre for Disease Control: Climate Change and Health Impacts

<http://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/effects/>

International Nurses Council Call to action on Climate Change

http://www.ordemenfermeiros.pt/relacoesinternacionais/gri_documentacao/ICN_TomadasdePosicao_o_versaoINGePT/TP_versao_ING/E08_Nurses_Climate_Change_Health.pdf

Oxfam: Making it Happen, Oxfam's proposals for a post-2015 framework

<http://www.oxfam.org.nz/sites/default/files/reports/bp187-making-happen-proposals-post-2015-framework-170614-enupdate.pdf>

The CTU Position Statement on Climate Change. (<http://union.org.nz/sites/union/files/Towards-Sustainability-Unions-and-Climate-Change-Mar-07.pdf>)

New Zealand government information on Climate Change

<https://www.climatechange.govt.nz/>

NZNO 2015 AGM Policy Remit on fossil fuels - <http://350.org.nz/our-work/gofossilfree/>

Climate Justice Aotearoa <http://www.climatejusticeaotearoa.org/>.

Healthy People Healthy Planet: a national initiative designed to harness the leadership of American hospital systems and healthcare institutions to engage their professionals, patients, and communities in support for climate and sustainability solutions.

<http://ecoamerica.org/programs/healthy-people-healthy-planet/>

International Trade Union Confederation position on Climate Change

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/climate-change>

Just Transitions: a range of social interventions needed to secure workers' jobs and livelihoods when economies are shifting to sustainable production, including avoiding climate change.

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@actrav/documents/publication/wcms_153352.pdf

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Mission statement

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery.

NZNO embraces te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa/ New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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NZNO Policy, Regulation & Legal position statement:

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