

WHO Academy education: globally oriented, multicultural approaches to climate change and health



WHO's programme on climate change and health¹ was established more than 25 years ago and, for the past 15 years, has supported countries to address the health risks from climate change. The programme aims to advance climate-resilient health by focusing on three key areas of work: addressing the wide range of health impacts from climate change, strengthening the climate resilience and environmental sustainability of health systems and facilities, and promoting the health benefits of climate change mitigation in other sectors. Tools, technical guidance, training packages, and related capacity-building activities have been developed and implemented across these three topics since the programme started. In 2021, more than 1500 health professionals participated in WHO training on climate change and health.

Recognising the importance of investing in people, WHO, with support from the French Government, launched the WHO Academy in 2020.² The WHO Academy aims to globally implement lifelong learning in health by offering multilingual, personalised learning programmes in digital, in-person, and blended formats, deploying the latest evidence-based health guidance, state-of-the-art learning technologies, and advancements in the science of adult learning. These individualised learning programmes can assist individuals who are more susceptible to the impact of climate change, such as people from small island nations; people with low socioeconomic status; people who identify as African, Hispanic, or Latinx; and some indigenous populations, including Native Americans and Pacific Islanders. For example, teaching modules provided by the WHO Academy can assist with programmes, such as the Land and Water Program, in which young indigenous people living in urban and rural areas learn about their relationships with land and place and their roles in protecting land and water. Participants are also connected with other young people in the same country, but from other backgrounds, who are also committed to climate action.³

Recognising climate change as the greatest threat of this century, but also the greatest opportunity to promote public health, WHO selected climate change

and health as one of the initial training packages to be developed by the WHO Academy. The content of its teaching resources includes an introduction to climate change and health; assessing health susceptibilities to climate change and health gains from climate change mitigation; developing health components of national adaptation plans and nationally determined health contributions; climate-informed health surveillance; climate resilience and environmental sustainability of health-care facilities; accessing climate-financing for climate change and health, with a focus on Green Climate Fund readiness proposals; and biodiversity, climate change, and health. Additionally, WHO provides many resources for climate action, climate change, health, negotiation strategies, and planning (table).

The Earth's climate is changing rapidly, and the manifestations of these changes are likely to intensify globally in the future and lead to greater regional and local climate instability. Given that some populations are more susceptible to climate change and health effects than others, and given the insufficient access to health care in many regions of the world, the WHO capacity-building programme has framed key questions⁴ for each country to understand how WHO provides support. With each question provided by WHO to each country, there is an assessment form, tool, or checklist for countries to use. For example, there is a checklist to assess vulnerabilities in health-care facilities in the context of climate change. Additionally, quality criteria are provided for Health National Adaptation Plans and WHO

	Teaching structure	Method of assessment
WHO Academy	Web-based ²	Self-assessment
WHO Country Support on Climate Change and Health	Self-taught ⁴	Modular tests with certificate at conclusion
WHO The Health Argument for Climate Action	Self-taught ⁵	Self-assessment
WHO Academy Climate Change and Health Toolkit	Self-taught web-based course ⁶	Provides resources and modular tests
UNCC:e-Learn Human Health And Climate Change	Course (2 h) ⁷	Quiz
UNCC:e-Learn Climate Change Negotiations and Health	Course (3 h) ⁸	Quiz
Climate Resilient Water Safety Plans	Web-based course ⁹	Quiz

Table: Resources for planetary health and climate change education

guidance is available to protect health from climate change through adaptation planning. Information on the financing (eg, Readiness Programme of the Green Climate Fund) is available to assist countries in their adaptation and mitigation assessments to meet the goals of planetary health. WHO also provides technical support for the implementation of a comprehensive set of interventions.

Climate change continues to demand improved sustainable health education and access to mitigation, economic, and adaptation plans for all people and countries. Countries report that a scarcity of financial and personnel resources are their main barriers to education and planning surrounding climate change and health issues.¹⁰

There is a crucial need for further capacity-building to sustain and scale up these educational programmes started by WHO, including through the WHO Academy. With the current programmes and resources, WHO is seeking partnerships and country-specific engagements to further the goals of the WHO Academy and ensure that capacity is effectively built at the regional and national level.

By becoming educated on climate change and health, health professionals and communities have the power to raise awareness among policy makers, governments, and health ministers regarding the consequences of climate change and to protect the health of people and the planet. As a key outcome of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference Health Programme, a total of 56 countries committed to strengthen the climate resilience and low-carbon sustainability of their health systems. This commitment shows momentum and support to build climate-resilient health. Global policy processes, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UNFCCC, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and WHO's mandate on climate change and health provide momentum and opportunities for comprehensive, integrated, and global solutions to climate change impacts on people, social determinants of health, and planetary health. The UN announced on Oct 8, 2021, that access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a human right.¹¹ All relevant climate change and health players, including academia, civil society, development agencies, and the UN, should join forces to ensure that capacity is built in a sustainable way at all levels.

In summary, there is an urgent need for sustained broad, multidisciplinary, climate science education for ministers of health, health-care professionals, and local communities to be integrated within each pertinent course or programme of study, across a long-lasting continuum of training that refreshes and develops from the involvement of these stakeholders. Efforts invested in training by the WHO Academy will benefit communities, whose health will be impacted by a period of climate change, for generations to come.

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