

56th DIRECTING COUNCIL

70th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

Washington, D.C., USA, 23-27 September 2018

Provisional Agenda Item 8.16

CD56/INF/16
3 July 2018
Original: English

STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE: FINAL REPORT

Background

1. This report summarizes progress in implementing the Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change for the period 2012-2017 (Document CD51/6, Rev. 1) (1) adopted by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Member States in 2011 during the 51st Directing Council (Resolution CD51.R15). The Strategy and Plan of Action was designed to prepare and strengthen national and local health systems to protect human health from risks related to climate change. Over the five years covered by the Plan, Member States made significant strides under each of its objectives and met or exceeded all its targets.

Analysis on Progress Achieved

2. Activities were conducted across the Region of the Americas in support of the Plan's four strategic lines of action. The most important achievements were *a)* the ongoing generation of evidence on the impacts of climate change on health through the Climate and Health Country Profile Project, an initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); *b)* the preparation and dissemination of training materials and courses, including an online course offered through the PAHO Virtual Campus for Public Health; *c)* the formation of intersectoral partnerships; and *d)* the development of diagnostics for increasing the resilience of health systems—for example, through support to Member States in preparing assessments of the systems' vulnerability and adaptation to climate change.

3. The target for knowledge generation to support evidence-based actions was exceeded: 23 Member States have now included climate indicators in their environmental health surveillance systems. Furthermore, they have established networks of stakeholders and institutions to share information on climate change and health as well as national joint ministerial committees on climate change. The Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB) worked with five Member States (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, United States of

America) to prepare and disseminate their profiles as part of the UNFCCC Climate and Health Country Profile Project of WHO (2). Six additional profiles were prepared and are under consultation. Launching of the quarterly *Caribbean Health Climatic Bulletin* (3) represented a successful partnership between PAHO, the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), and the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology. Work with collaborating centers continued to provide countries with support on evidence-building and informed decision-making. For example, a series of reports on sustainable development and health were produced in coordination with the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation and the Brazilian Ministry of Health, which together with PAHO oversee the ongoing Climate and Health Observatory in Brazil. Also, evidence was disseminated in the form of a chapter on climate change and health in the PAHO publication *Health in the Americas 2017* (4).

4. Member States expanded their efforts to raise awareness and promote education on climate change, successfully meeting the target for this strategic area. Activities focused on producing information and sensitizing decision-makers about projected climate-related health outcomes and on developing national and regional strategies to reduce risks to public health. For example, PASB provided technical support for development of the Mercosur Strategy to Protect Health against Climate Change (5) and supported organization of the regional framework Advancing Caribbean Cooperation in Health IV. In addition, the Bureau supported the Government of Peru on the organization of health meetings in preparation for and during the twentieth session of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties. Also, in collaboration with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, PASB assisted with the organization of a training program and the publication of a report on risk management and adaptation to climate change, which helped countries in the Amazon subregion to incorporate a health perspective in their plans. Furthermore, PASB assisted in the preparation of a United Nations report on the social dimensions of climate change (6). To raise awareness about the health risks associated with climate change, PASB worked with the National Public Health Institute in Mexico to launch an online course in Spanish about climate change and health. The course, available on the PAHO Virtual Campus, has been accessed by over 5,000 people from 34 countries.

5. Under the strategy that called for building partnerships on climate change among health-oriented institutions, 33 Member States submitted health sector contributions as part of their national communications to the UNFCCC, far exceeding the target. PASB, for its part, assisted in the establishment of multidisciplinary expert groups and networks to guide and strengthen health sector actions on climate change. It also helped to organize preparatory meetings, prepare reports, and provide financial support for health representatives from the Americas to participate in UNFCCC Conference of Parties and other international meetings on the subject. These actions were accompanied by the launching of global multistakeholder initiatives such as the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, the Ministerial Declaration on Health, Environment, and Climate Change, and the global initiative on climate change and health of Small Island Developing States. PASB provided Member States with awareness-raising, training, and support toward fulfillment of these global commitments.

6. Finally, Member States also exceeded the target for actions to develop health system response capacity to adapt to climate change. In all, 27 Member States completed their climate change and health vulnerability and adaptation assessments. PASB provided technical cooperation on designing and executing national strategies and adaptation plans that address the health risks of climate change. Member States received guidance on the preparation of vulnerability and adaptation assessments and the health chapters of national adaptation plans (H-NAPs) through the WHO publications *Protecting Health from Climate Change: Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessment (7)* and *Operational Framework for Building Climate Resilient Health Systems (8)*, as well as training and technical support in all subregions of the Americas.

Strategic Line of Action 1: Evidence: Strengthening the generation and dissemination of knowledge regarding health risks associated with climate change and about the appropriate public health response to this phenomenon

Objective	Indicator, baseline, and target	Status
Promote and support the generation and dissemination of knowledge to facilitate evidence-based actions to reduce health risks associated with climate change	Number of countries that include climate indicators in their environmental health surveillance systems Baseline: 7 Target: 20	23 countries Participation in the Climate and Health Country Profile Project in partnership with UNFCCC.

Strategic Line of Action 2: Awareness-raising and education: Creating awareness and increasing knowledge about the health effects of climate change among the general public and in other sectors, including health personnel, by promoting training and by communicating and disseminating information through a multidisciplinary approach

Objective	Indicator, baseline, and target	Status
Raise awareness and increase knowledge of the effects of climate change on health in order to facilitate public health interventions	Number of countries that include information on climate change and health in their national climate change strategies Baseline: 14 Target: 25	25 countries PAHO Virtual Campus online course on climate change and health (in Spanish); Training on health in national adaptation plans.

Strategic Line of Action 3: Partnerships: Promoting, articulating, and establishing cross-disciplinary, interagency, and intersectoral partnerships to ensure that health protection and promotion is central to climate change policies

Objective	Indicator, baseline, and target	Status
Promote policies and interventions in and between countries in coordination with other agencies and sectors	Number of countries in which the health sector contributes to the UNFCCC reporting on health issues in their National Communications to the Convention Baseline: 14 Target: 25	33 countries Launch of global multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Strategic Line of Action 4: Adaptation: Strengthening and developing the capacity of health systems to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate adaptation measures designed to improve response capacity to the risks posed by climate change

Objective	Indicator, baseline, and target	Status
Support the evaluation of the population's vulnerability to climate change and identify adaptation interventions	Number of countries that have completed climate change and health vulnerability adaptation assessments Baseline: 13 Target: 25	27 countries Publication of documents and training to guide country preparation of national strategies and plans.

Action Necessary to Improve the Situation

7. To maintain the progress achieved under the Strategy and Plan of Action (2012-2017), it is important to continue to build capacities and provide support to countries for the participation of health representatives in the global climate change agenda and for the implementation of regional and national actions on climate change and health. Those actions should take relevant international frameworks and initiatives into consideration, including the Paris Agreement 2015 (9), as applicable, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (10), and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (11).

8. Despite the growing recognition that health is one of the sectors most affected by climate change, there are gaps and challenges in the development of national and regional actions to build climate-resilient health systems, while lowering its carbon footprint. Funding is needed to build the human resources capacity, and to understand, prepare and respond to challenges posed by climate-sensitive diseases, extreme weather events, and heatwaves, among others. The way forward starts with recognizing the vulnerabilities of health systems to climate change at the regional, national and subnational levels, and then by preparing multisectoral plans and roadmaps to increase health system resilience—for

example, H-NAPs and adaptation projects. Those plans and projects should particularly address climate threats to the most vulnerable, including rural and indigenous populations who often have limited access to health education and services. Health considerations should be the basis for articulating intersectoral actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change and degrade air quality, and health indicators should be used to assess the success of those interventions. Sustainable systems need to be implemented in transportation, agriculture, water and sanitation, and energy production, among other areas, taking into account the avoided costs to health. In addition, infrastructural changes in health facilities, health services and sustainable procurement systems can directly reduce emissions from the health sector, reduce costs, and help the sector lead by example.

Action by the Directing Council

9. The Directing Council is invited to take note of this final report and provide any comments as it deems pertinent.

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