

2015

Policy

# Climate and health

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*The Swedish Medical Association*



## Climate and health

### The Swedish Medical Association's policy to promote climate action and health.

Over the past 100 years, the world's population has quadrupled, while per capita energy consumption has increased tripled. Available cheap fossil fuels and technological advances have led to a remarkable development in people's prosperity and quality of life, although distribution is still very uneven.

This rapid development has led to increased human pressure on the global, biophysical processes that are essential for the ecosystems that sustain us.

The WHO has stated that there is very strong evidence that human activities are affecting the global climate and that climate change has serious implications for public health. Extreme weather events and impacts on food and water supply are the direct effects of changes in ecosystems that are associated with global warming and which are creating significant health risks, such as increased numbers of deaths caused by heat waves and natural disasters, as well as the increased prevalence of vector-borne diseases such as malaria.

Continued climate change will have very adverse social and environmental impacts. From a global perspective,

the countries with weak infrastructure will suffer most, i.e. mainly developing countries. The effects of an increase in global mean temperature and its impact on health are widespread: storms and flooding, severe heat waves and droughts. The impact on drinking water and air quality can have major impacts on public health, such as an altered disease panorama and increased psychosocial stress.

Apart from the direct adverse effects on health, climate change also gives rise to ocean acidification because of the rapid increase in carbon dioxide, which in turn affects biodiversity. Declining ozone levels in the atmosphere and a lack of fresh water are other examples. Overall, the risks are great, not only for agriculture and food security but also for the economy generally and for public health.

At the same time, humanity is in a position of major development potential. Green economy, which includes revolutionary technologies and changes in certain living habits, is expected to generate more jobs and increase the prospects for improved health and reduced levels of poverty globally. The overall assessment is that climate





change represents the largest challenge for the future of humanity. It also represents the greatest opportunity to improve health in a global perspective, but only if the world's countries act quickly. In the short-term, a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is absolutely essential. A society free of fossil-fuel consumption is healthier and involves less exposure to air pollutants, which is of major importance for public health. The basis for the further development of society is that we must nurture and conserve the ecosystems that are the basis for our continued existence.

The Swedish Medical Association believes that human activities should not lead to serious changes in the Earth's climate. For example, by changing our eating habits, and thus altering our mode of food production, like a reduced use of fossil fuels, can reduce carbon dioxide emissions, while health benefits can also be expected.

For doctors, it is necessary to increase awareness of how health and healthcare are affected by changes in climate and the environment, and to find its role in how society will deal with these problems. The WHO, EU and the World Medical Association have for many years emphasized the importance of urgently initiating this work, where the British Medical Association is a role model.

The Swedish Medical Association's policy aims to stimulate the further development of preventive and adaptive

climate and health measures within health and healthcare on a local, national and global level. The main standpoint is the importance of highlighting how doctors and the Swedish Medical Association can contribute positively to the climate issue, with a particular focus on health issues. The doctors has an important role to play in raising awareness of the impacts of climate change on health, and in promoting a more environmentally friendly lifestyle. It is important that physicians share their knowledge and experience in the areas of climate and health by disseminating information in various ways and by interacting with other professions and organizations.

*The Swedish Medical Association has an important role to play when it comes to:*

- Identifying and supporting measures that reduce the impact on the environment, yet also lead to improved health. These can include sustainable energy consumption, sustainable transport systems and changes in the modes of production and consumption of food.
- Promoting an adaption of healthcare services to challenges raised by future climate- and environmental changes.

- Influencing attitudes and public opinion by providing scientifically based facts for policy makers and the public regarding the links between climate, climate change and health within the context of our profession.
- Conveying the message that the transition to a sustainable society for future generations means developing a society with new technology and better opportunities for good health.
- Working globally, because the climate's effects on health are global phenomena and must be resolved in a spirit of equality, improved cooperation and respect for human rights.

### **This is what the Swedish Medical Association can do in its internal activities**

The Swedish Medical Association shall be a role model in its environmental work. Laws and regulations should be considered as the lowest level in environmental efforts. The association's activities should be conducted with as little environmental impact as possible. Concern for the environment shall characterize the association's activities and become a natural part of its daily work. In order to contribute to sustainable development, all employees and elected officials in the association should be familiar with the association's

policies and should be involved in environmental efforts to make the best possible choices in order to reduce the impact on the environment. The intentions of the policy and all of the activities of the association should be regularly reviewed, evaluated and reported.

#### *The Swedish Medical Association intends to:*

- Create environmental awareness among the association's elected representatives and employees.
- Prioritize environmentally labelled products and utilise the opportunities available to impose environmental requirements for the procurement and purchase of goods and services.
- Ensure that the association's activities are conducted in a sustainable manner by reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions.
- Identify key issues and work and push these issues forwards.
- Apply an environmentally friendly travel and meeting policy.
- Support a more environmentally sound policy for future capital investment.



## The Swedish Medical Association's role at a local and national level

This is what the Swedish Medical Association can do to support the doctors.

Several regions in Sweden has already come a long way in the implementation of preventive measures and are working to adapt healthcare services to the changing climate. They are working with problem analyses, forecasts and strategies, which include energy efficiency, management of heat waves and flooding. The Medical Association's role is to support and disseminate knowledge about these developments.



- Disseminate information about and prevent adverse impacts on the environment caused by the inappropriate use of medicines.
- Increase awareness about how we are affected when ecosystems are destroyed.
- Increase knowledge about where and how equipment and medical technology used in healthcare are manufactured and recycled.

*The Swedish Medical Association intends to:*

- Support individual doctors and healthcare providers when it comes to identifying and initiating measures to both reduce environmental impacts and promote improved health.
- Act as a forum for knowledge and debate as well as help develop and spread ideas.
- Exchange knowledge and experience in the areas of climate and health in various ways by interacting with other professions and organizations.

## The Swedish Medical Association's role at the global level

The Swedish Medical Association has a key role in increasing awareness and understanding that the health issues are global; tackling current problems like infections, antibiotic resistance and food-borne diseases requires international coordination.

*The Swedish Medical Association intends to:*

- Collaborate with other national medical associations and international organizations to increase awareness and ensure that concrete steps are taken to remedy the problems associated with global climate and health.

## The Swedish Medical Association's role in education

Healthcare practitioners, particularly doctors, are of major importance when it comes to explaining causation in states of illness. It is therefore important that doctors acquire knowledge about the relationship between climate and health. The Swedish Medical Association therefore believes that knowledge about the relationship between climate and health should be a regular feature in medical education. Since future developments will happen rapidly and will be unpredictable, it is reasonable to regularly provide education concerning climate and health during speciality service and training. The education needs to provide a historical perspective, combined with an ecological perspective, as well as teaching about the direct health effects on humans in different parts of the world.

In practising their profession, doctors should be role models in environmental efforts.

*The Swedish Medical Association intends to:*

- Work to ensure that climate and health will be integrated and a natural part of the basic medical education for doctors.
- Promote and work towards good quality education and training about climate and health as part of both specialist training as well as continued professional development.

## References

World Health Assembly and Executive Board policy documents on climate change and health: [http://www.who.int/globalchange/health\\_policy/wha\\_eb\\_documentation/en/](http://www.who.int/globalchange/health_policy/wha_eb_documentation/en/)

EU: Climate and human health

<http://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/health>

WMA Declaration of Delhi on Health and Climate Change

<http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/c5/>

The British Medical Association

<http://bma.org.uk/working-for-change/international-affairs/climate-change>

Klimatsäkrat Skåne

<http://utveckling.skane.se/publikationer/rapporter-analyseroch-prognoiser/klimatsakrat-skane/>



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