



# Parliamentary and Scientific Committee



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## Climate Change and Health: Surviving Rising Global Temperatures

Climate change poses one of the biggest threats to human health we've ever seen, and tonight we heard from five expert speakers about this threat and methods to overcome it. Dr Marina Romanello, Research Director for the Lancet Countdown, spoke to us about how increasing exposure to heat is having a profound effect on human health. Prof. Mike Tipton, Professor of Human & Applied Physiology at the University of Portsmouth and Chair of The Physiological Society's Policy Committee, spoke to us about a report the Physiological Society released outlining the health effects of climate change and how these are predicted to progress. Prof. Madeleine Thomson, Head of Climate Impacts at Wellcome, discussed Wellcome's plan to support key research looking into how we adapt to climate change and reduce its negative impacts on human health. Betty Osei Bonsu, Project Coordinator at Green Youth Africa Organisation (GAYO), told us about on-the-ground projects being used to alleviate the health effects of climate change in West Africa. Lastly, Dr Elaine Mulcahy, Interim Director of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, discussed how the health community will be absolutely key in minimising the worst effects of climate change. We had a varied Q&A section, with many questions focusing on the details of the health impacts of climate change.

The health effects of warming global temperatures are already being seen. Dr Romanello explained to us, while experiencing the Buenos Aires heatwave herself, how both children younger than 1 year old and adults over 65 years old have seen a dramatic increase in heatwave exposure in recent years, with both of these being the most vulnerable age groups to the adverse effects of excess heat. Heat-related deaths in those aged 65+ reached a record high of 345,000 in 2019, with all WHO regions, except Europe, seeing an increase in heat-related

deaths. This excess heat has also resulted in a reduction in productivity across many regions.

This heat also results in dramatic changes to the environment. Prof. Tipton explained to us that between 1 billion and 3 billion people will be in unliveable environments within the next 50 years, meaning this group will need to migrate. Ms Bonsu described how these unliveable environments are already being seen in West Africa, with water supply being greatly effected and organisations like GAYO needing to act now to prepare local communities for these challenges.

Prof. Tipton, in outlining The Physiological Society's report, discussed how many of the health effects of excess heat are poorly understood. This exposure can result in cardiovascular and neural network damage, yet the mechanisms aren't clear to us yet. If we hope to adapt to our changing environment and prevent the worst damage to human health further research into the physiology of this is needed. Wellcome has outlined how it will help support this research, with Prof. Thomson explaining to us how £75 million has been pledged to accelerate climate and health research, with funding for this research being decided by the Wellcome trust and the scientists it works with.

Dr Mulcahy outlined how in recent years climate change has been recognised as a public health issue, which is a welcome change. Public health sector is a trusted and very connected group in society, and they will be absolutely vital in communicating with the public as we move through this challenge.

*Alfie Hoar*

*P&SC Discussion Meeting, 'Climate Change and Health: Surviving Rising Global Temperatures'  
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