



# Parliamentary and Scientific Committee



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## The Health Crisis of Climate Change: did COP27 Deliver?

Climate change is the greatest risk to human health we face this century. This evening we heard from four expert speakers about the link between climate and health, and the policies needed to reduce harm. Prof. Mike Tipton MBE, Professor of Human & Applied Physiology at the University of Portsmouth and Chair of the Policy Committee at The Physiological Society, spoke to us about the role of physiology in the climate crisis. Dr Marina Romanello, Research Director of the Lancet Countdown Annual Report on Climate Change and Health, spoke to us about how climate change mitigation policies can be enacted to improve human health. Prof. Madeleine Thomson, Head of Climate Impacts at the Wellcome Trust, spoke to us about what the Wellcome Trust was doing to look into the link between health and climate change, as well as its participation at COP27. Lastly, Hiten Patel, Head of Net Zero Delivery for the Greener NHS programme for NHS England, spoke to us about how the NHS is responding to climate change. We had an impassioned Q&A session, with many questions revolving round what action the government should take.

The climate crisis is a human health crisis, with an estimated 1-3 billion people living outside survivable climate conditions over the next 50 years. Prof. Tipton discussed how physiology will be crucial in mitigating against the health impacts. For example, better understanding of our thermoregulatory system will enable us to both reduce demand on high energy consuming technology, whilst also adapting buildings and planning to mitigate against increasing temperatures. Prof. Tipton also emphasised the point that health and climate change are interdependent; increasing temperatures leads to increasing strain on the health care system, which in turn increases emissions. Working out how to break this cycle is crucial.

Climate action can improve health. A clear example

that Dr Romanello gave was how overconsumption of red meat and dairy led to over 105,000 excess deaths in 2019. This produce also counts for 61% of consumption-based agricultural emissions. It's clear how moving to more plant based diets can both reduce emissions and improve health.

The Wellcome Trust was an active player at COP27, participating at the health pavilion. Prof. Thomson found it optimistic that there had been an increased interest in the topic of health, but emphasised that more work needs to be done to support lower and middle income countries. More work needs to be done to make the health impacts of climate change more visible before COP28 also.

As a major health system, the NHS must respond to climate change by both preparing for the impacts and reducing its emissions. Mr Patel discussed many of the ways the NHS aims to reduce emissions, with the goal of reaching net zero direct emissions by 2040 and indirect emissions by 2045. The upfront cost of reducing emissions on a large scale will be high, but it's clear that it will pay-off quickly when the health impacts of climate change are considered.

The health challenges of climate change are a key way to engage the general public and politicians, as all of us have a vested interest. All of the speakers emphasised that COP27 wasn't ambitious enough to restrict emissions to reach the 1.5 degrees warming target, with the aim to reach peak emissions by 2025 removed. Going beyond this target will drastically worsen the health impacts of climate change, adding strain to our health system and our lives. Therefore, the number one action government can take to improve health prospects is ambitious emission reduction targets.

*Alfie Hoar*

*P&SC Discussion Meeting, 'The Health Crisis of Climate Change: did COP27 Deliver?'*

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