

Position Statement

Impact of climate change

Background

Concerns about climate change and the related impact on human and planetary health are escalating with planetary degradation continuing at an unprecedented pace. Climate change now threatens both human health and life-support systems and urgent consolidated global action is needed.¹

The environmental threats to human health resulting from climate change are significant and many. As the effects of climate change intensify, health services (especially those in low-income countries) will struggle resulting in inadequate provision of care (including emergency obstetric and newborn care), family planning, reproductive health care and immunisation. Climate change may result in human displacement with resulting health impact due to inadequate nutrition (for pregnant women, newborns, children and adolescents), lack of hygiene services and supplies in emergency shelters for pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding or who are menstruating.² All these factors have the potential to increase global maternal and infant mortality rates.

As key influencers, all healthcare workers are being urged to act on climate change to minimise these threats to human health. Midwives have an essential role in influencing social change to address climate change and contribute to sustainability.

Position

Many of the potential effects of climate change could have serious consequences for women, newborns and families as well as for midwives themselves. It is therefore important for the midwifery profession to recognise the significance of the threat of climate change and to find ways of contributing to the management of local and global environmental issues relating to climate change.

¹ Gupta, J., Hurley, F., Grobicki, A., Keating, T., Stoett, P., Baker, E., Guhl, A., Davies, J., and Ekins, P. (2019) Commentary. Communicating the health of the planet and its links to human health. The Lancet Planetary Health. (3) May. pp:e204 – e206. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(19\)30040-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(19)30040-3)

² UNFPA and WE DO. (2009) Climate Change Connections. Women at the Forefront. Available at: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/climateconnections_1_overview_1.pdf

Recommendations

ICM encourages member associations to:

- Be aware of the scientific consensus that global climate change is occurring and that human behaviours are making significant contributions.
- Incorporate the health implications of climate change for childbearing communities into midwifery education and professional development.
- Recognise the importance of midwifery input in climate change policymaking at national, regional, and global levels and aim to achieve representation wherever possible.
- Encourage government agencies to strengthen public health infrastructure to ensure that the global health effects of climate change can be anticipated and responded to more efficiently within childbearing communities.
- Encourage midwives to serve as role models for promoting environmental sustainability and play an active role in educating women and their families on sustainable practices.
- Conduct research to further inform the climate change agenda in relation to both midwifery practice and the impact of climate change on the childbearing community.

Related ICM Documents

- ICM. 2014. Core Document. International Code of Ethics for Midwives.
- ICM. 2014. Core Document. Philosophy and Model of Midwifery Care.
- ICM. 2019. Core Document. Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice.

Other Relevant Documents

- Davies, L., Daellenbach, R., and Kensington, M. (2021) Sustainability, Midwifery and Birth. Second Edition. Routledge, London. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/sustainability-midwifery-birth-lorna-davies-rea-daellenbach-mary-kensington/e/10.4324/9780429290558>
- Costello, A., et al. (2009) Managing the health effects of climate change. The Lancet (373) pp: 1693–733. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(09\)60935-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(09)60935-1/fulltext)
- Hope, P., Bamford, S., Beales, S., Brett, K., Kneale, D. Macdonnell, M., and McKeon, A. (2012) Creating Sustainable Health and Care Systems in Ageing Societies Report of the Ageing Societies Working Group. Global Health Policy Summit. Available at: https://ilcuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GHPS_Ageing_Societies_Report.pdf
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (IPCC) (2010) Understanding Climate Change: 22 years of IPCC assessment". Available at: http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/press/ipcc_leaflets_2010/ipcc-brochure_understanding.pdf
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2021) The United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/>
- McMichael, A.J. (2013) Globalization, Climate Change and Human Health. New England Journal of Medicine (368) pp: 1335-43. Available at: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMra1109341>

- Watts, N., et al. (2018) The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: from 25 years of inaction to a global transformation for public health. The Lancet. (391):10120. pp: 581-630. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)32464-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)32464-9/fulltext)
- Watts, N., et al. (2018) The 2018 report of the Lancet countdown on health and climate change: shaping the health of nations for centuries to come. The Lancet (382):10163. pp: 2479 – 2514. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)32594-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)32594-7/fulltext)

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