ACTION FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

COP31: TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE AND ACHIEVING GLOBAL HEALTH EQUITY – TIME TO ACT

BRIEFING - NOVEMBER 2026

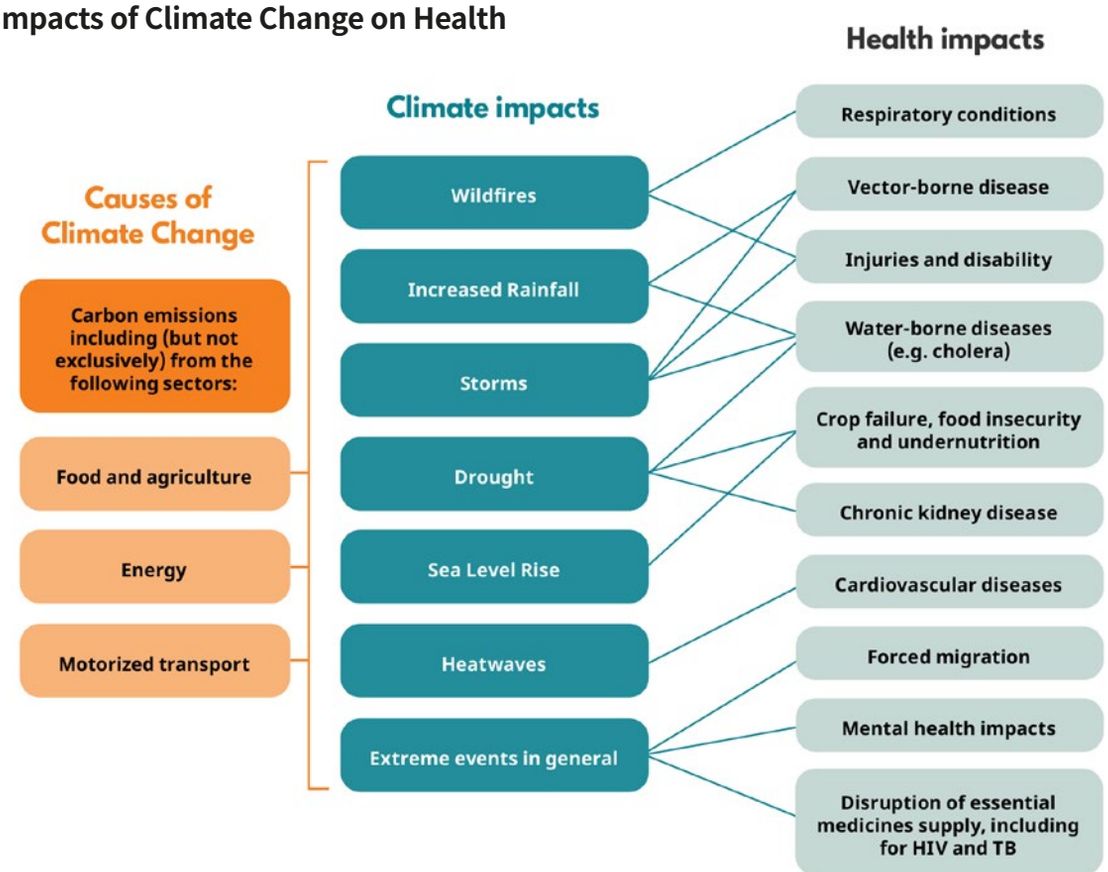
Action for Global Health (AfGH) is a UK-based network of more than 50 organisations working towards a world where the universal right to health is realised. AfGH acts as the coordinator between the UK government and global health civil society, convening regular meetings and sharing learning from across our network.

Climate change represents the greatest threat to global health of the 21st century, and threatens to undermine decades of gains in development and health.

COP 31 represents an important opportunity for the UK Government to take action to address health security and climate change, two of the five interconnected securities identified by International Development Minister Kirsty McNeill, alongside food, human economic security. Climate change is a global health crisis, and global health inequities are both caused by and contribute to climate crisis.

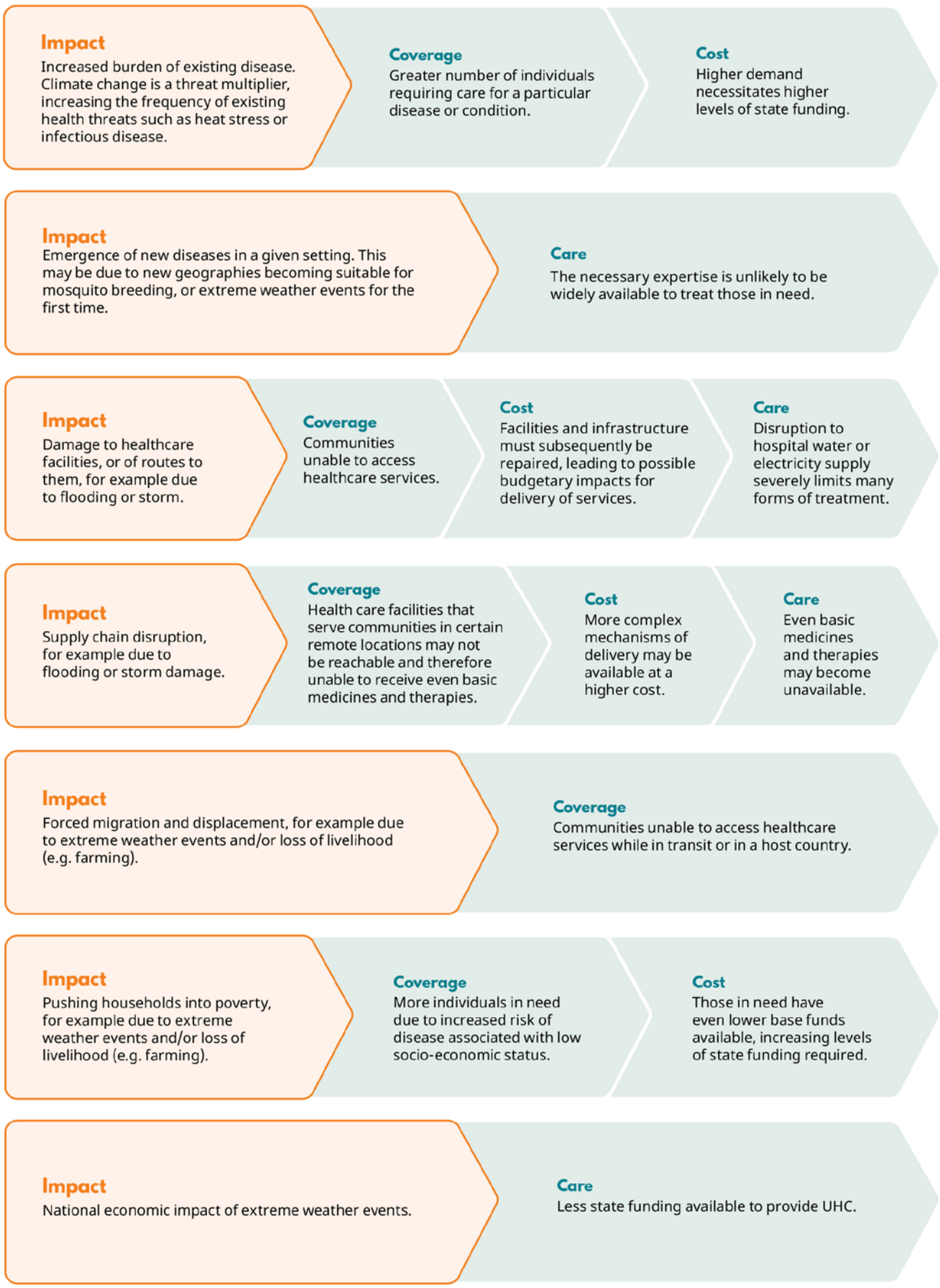
The impacts of climate change on health are significant and clear, as summarised in the below diagram.

Figure 1: Impacts of Climate Change on Health



Failure to act on climate change will severely jeopardise the realisation of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Chart 1: How climate change erodes progress towards UHC



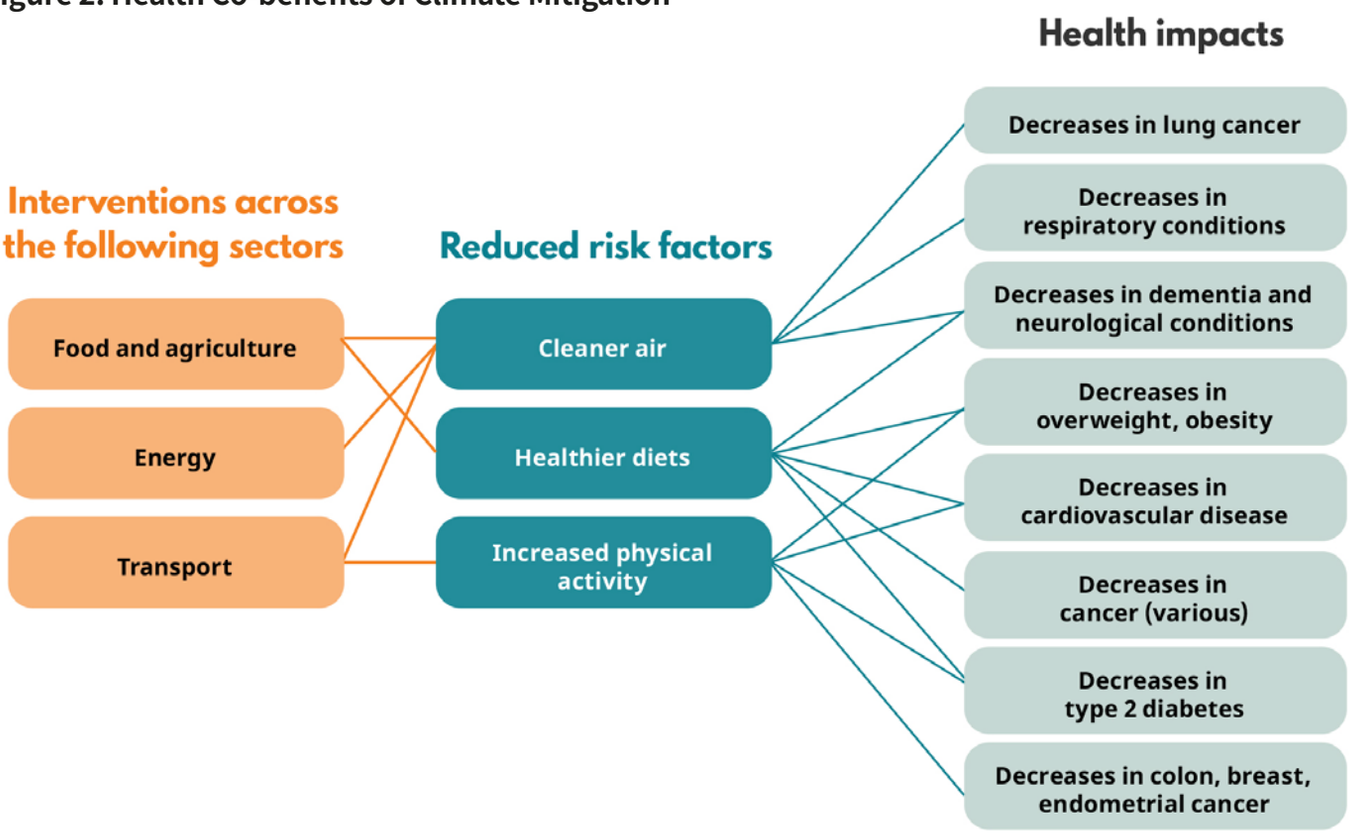
The impacts of climate change on health are strongly influenced by individual and population factors, including age, gender, income and prior health status. Older people and children are less able to respond and protect themselves from immediate hazards while older people, especially those living with pre-existing health conditions, are especially vulnerable to the health impacts of heat.

The negative health impacts of climate change already span all world regions, with no population unaffected. However, LMICs experience higher exposure to some risks while having access to dramatically fewer resources to protect themselves, which results in heightened levels of vulnerability.

Conversely, while LMICs face the most dire consequences, it is the high- and upper-middle income countries that emit 86% of global CO2 emissions - a major cause of climate change. Centuries of colonisation followed by a highly inequitable global economic system have accelerated environmental degradation through extraction and deforestation, coupled with racial oppression and gender injustice, at severe and enduring cost to human and lanetary health.

It is vital that the international community unites to ensure that ambitious action is taken to mitigate climate change and prioritise interventions that yield additional health co-benefits and tackle health inequalities, while also maximising adaptation and resilience of health systems. Concerted and collaborative action in response to climate change yields substantial health returns, such that tackling climate change offers the greatest global health opportunity of this century.

Figure 2: Health Co-benefits of Climate Mitigation



Domestically, the impact of increasing temperatures is impacting health services across the UK. A report from the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change[1] found that over 90% of NHS buildings in England are vulnerable to overheating, with ward temperatures above 30°C recorded, and overheating incidents affecting patient care, staff wellbeing and critical infrastructure such as IT system failure.

[1] Manton-Roseblade E. Climate emergency: 90% of NHS buildings are vulnerable to overheating, warns UK health alliance BMJ 2025; 389 :r1275 doi:10.1136/bmj.r1275

Students for Global Health UK recently ran a Climate and Health Policy Sprint, bringing together a small group of students and future healthcare workers from across the UK and from a range of academic backgrounds, including medicine, biomedical sciences, public health and global health policy, to explore how the future healthcare workforce can be better prepared to respond to the health impacts of climate change. Participants attended a series of collaborative sessions and examined existing evidence, shared perspectives on the challenges facing healthcare professionals, and developed recommendations aimed at strengthening climate and health education, workforce preparedness and health system resilience.

A central theme emerging from the sprint was the importance of ensuring that efforts to strengthen climate and health education and preparedness do not place additional burdens on an already overstretched healthcare workforce. Participants emphasised the need for adequate institutional support, in addition to exploring how climate and health education could be more effectively integrated into existing healthcare training, with greater emphasis on practical skills and clinical exposure. Beyond education and training, participants considered how healthcare professionals and students could be more meaningfully involved in shaping climate and health policy, helping to ensure that approaches to health system resilience reflect the experiences of those working within healthcare settings.

Students for Global Health is a student network and registered charity tackling local and global health inequalities through **education, advocacy and community social action.**

The UK has demonstrated some commitment to addressing the interlinkages between climate change and health, as outlined further in our Climate and Health Financing briefing (A New Era: Opportunities for the UK's Approach to Tackling Climate Change and Global Health Inequities). The UK's elevation of health at COP26, the influencing of climate and health initiatives (e.g. COP28 framework, WHA Resolution on Climate Change & Health), and the UK's role in the Alliance for Action on Climate Change and Health (ATACH) are all very welcome. However, they need to go much further.

The UK has committed approximately £6 billion of ODA as International Climate Finance over the next three years, a substantial portion of the total ODA envelope. Yet its primary purpose remains mitigation, adaptation and energy transition, with health treated largely as a downstream consequence rather than a primary purpose. In 2022, 2% of UK climate ODA was directed to health-specific programmes, against an average of 6% across comparable donors. By 2024, only two of 217 UK-funded health programmes addressed climate-related health risks. In 2023, 6.5% of FCDO's International Climate Finance (ICF) spending was nutrition related. This creates a structural gap between the health and malnutrition impacts of climate change and the extent to which climate finance is explicitly designed or monitored to address those impacts.

When Cyclone Freddy damaged 63 health facilities across southern Malawi, rebuilding costs fell primarily on a health system already under severe financial pressure. The absence of dedicated health-focused climate financing exposed the gap between climate adaptation commitments and the practical requirements of maintaining health services in climate-vulnerable settings.

AFGH RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The UK must work with international partners to address the stark funding gaps in climate-health financing, through both public and private sector channels.
- The UK should advocate for greater emphasis on the climate-health agenda in the broader international financial reform architecture in a way that benefits both climate and health.
- The UK should increase the integration of climate-health best practices into both its climate and health programming - seeking to scale its impact through consistent integration into broader programmes and putting in place systems to track the degree to which it is addressing the climate-health nexus across its work.
- The UK must match or exceed the DAC average of 6% of climate finance being allocated to health-specific programmes and establish an alternative and additional benchmark of its own against which it can track progress.
- The UK Government should promote an ambitious vision for building resilient, inclusive health systems and achieving UHC through their upcoming G20 Presidency, COP31 and COP32 Summits, and the 2027 High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage.

To find out more about Action for Global Health, visit **actionforglobalhealth.org.uk** or contact **Jacqui Stevenson, Director**, at jacqui@actionforglobalhealth.org.uk.

Further reading:

- Action for Global Health, 2023. Climate and Health Equity Briefing Series: Climate and Energy. Link

- Action for Global Health, 2023. Climate and Health Equity Briefing Series: Health Systems and Wider Infrastructure Strengthening. Link

- Action for Global Health, 2024. Stocktake Review. **Link**
- Action for Global Health, 2021. Health Inequalities and Climate Change: Action for Global Health Position Paper. Link

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