Statement by the European Public Health Association (EUPHA) and Portuguese Association of Public Health Doctors (ANMSP) on Health systems need to adapt to climate change

The Climate Summit in Paris (COP21) in 2015 was a ground-breaking meeting resulting in the Paris agreement, a binding agreement adopted by over 180 countries towards the common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects.[1]

It is clear that climate change has a direct impact on human lives and health in a variety of ways, with secondary effects on the healthcare sector. We are seeing a change in current needs, namely human resources, better technology and smart governance allowing better preparedness and response and aiming to ensure more resilient and adaptive health systems.

The evidence has shown that climate change has a serious impact – directly and indirectly – on the public's health.[2] For instance, we see a rise in natural disasters, morbidity and mortality of certain diseases, change in disease patterns including tropical diseases emerging or re-emerging in Europe and an increase in pollution problems. All these developments linked to climate change are an extra burden on an already loaded health system, and these need to be accounted for in future health systems planning as well as in adapting current ones.

In reverse, the healthcare sector and the current *modus operandi* exert a considerable impact on climate change (e.g. the carbon footprint), when in fact it should be leading by example, adapting processes and actions to reduce climate impact. The healthcare sector – through its rules and regulations – has become a major economic player requiring a lot of energy (power consumption, waste and emissions production) related to heating, lighting, other medical equipment requirements, transport, supplies, etc. All these requirements were aggravated by the pandemic - the increase in usage of medical equipment due to stricter rules on disinfection results in higher production of waste, making the impact on climate change even greater. The healthcare climate footprint of the European Union is 248 MtCO2e, making it the third largest emitter, globally, when considering the European Union as a single emitter i.e. a sum of all its Member States' emission (the USA and China are first and second).[3]

All European countries should shift their attention to areas such as energy efficient buildings, renewable heating, cooling and transport in healthcare. We should look for win-win models and best buys, which increase patient care as well as encourage healthy and sustainable choices.

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[1] https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement

[2] https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/30/5/928/5512023?searchresult=1

[3] https://noharm-global.org/sites/default/files/documents-files/5961/HealthCaresClimateFootprint_092319.pdf

Reinventing healthcare in the face of climate change is an immense challenge and a lengthy process and we need to rethink our priorities and needs at professional and individual level. It is clear that patient care and safety must remain the main priority, but environmental health advocacy, ecologically sustainable healthcare and high standards in energy efficiency should be put on the table when planning and implementing projects, programmes and systems.

Taking climate change into account, any system – including the healthcare system – should adapt so it does not become obsolete, outdated or – worse – counterproductive. It is up to us – the healthcare workforce – to move forward, to change when and where we can and to make this change last. If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that healthcare should be flexible and adaptable to known and unknown risks. This change is a process rather than a short intervention and it is up to us to keep questioning progress and change. As Gandhi stated: '*you must be the change you wish to see*'. Let our analysis and our actions be the advocate for the right change of our health systems in the right direction.

EUPHA and the Portuguese Association of Public Health Doctors (Associação Nacional dos Médicos de Saúde Pública, ANMSP) call upon their members to start the change where you can and advocate for climate-resilient healthcare systems that are adaptable to future challenges and fit for protecting health from climate change.

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The European Public Health Association, or EUPHA in short, is an umbrella organisation for public health associations in Europe. Our network of national associations of public health represents around 20'000 public health professionals. Our mission is to facilitate and activate a strong voice of the public health network by enhancing visibility of the evidence and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals. EUPHA contributes to the preservation and improvement of public health in the European region through capacity and knowledge building. We are committed to creating a more inclusive Europe, narrowing all health inequalities among Europeans, by facilitating, activating, and disseminating strong evidence-based voices from the public health community and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals to achieve evidence-based change.

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