

7.C. Workshop: Energy transition as a challenge for public health

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Quality of life depends on energy. All activities in housing, education sector, health sector and other sectors need energy. Public health implications of energy choices are slowly getting to the top of the agenda in climate and energy discussions globally. Modern society, in the era of climate change, is seriously recognizing the relation between energy and health as high-level public health policy challenge.

Health toll, in terms of ill health and cost to health systems due to fossil fuel use and climate change, is growing year by year. Health sector's awareness of energy choices and energy related policies has prompted global action to phase out all fossil fuels as soon as possible.

Burning fossil fuels causes air pollution and climate change, representing the biggest threat to public health of the 21st century. Whereas fossil fuels have played a crucial role to power the world economy and deliver unprecedented affluence to huge numbers of people since the 18th century, those same fuels are now threatening life on earth. Despite the Paris Agreement and national commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, virtually all governments continue to spend huge amounts of public money on supporting the oil, gas and coal industry in the production of fossil fuels. These so-called fossil fuel subsidies create health costs up to 20 times their amount.

The costs to health stemming from the resulting air pollution, climate change and environmental degradation are not carried by the industry but paid by society: For every billion dollars the world's richest 20 governments spend on fossil fuel subsidies more than 10,000 people die of air pollution.

Improving children's health and reducing environmental risks should be at the heart of sustainable development and energy transition. Furthermore, energy poverty, good lighting for education, clean transportation, comfortable heating and cooling all play a key role in children's development and well-being. Social barriers in the context of the energy sector face the risk of being neglected in global and national negotiations and decision-making, as well as in programme planning that is intended to benefit local populations, including women and children.

Key messages:

- Energy transition needs to be at the core of public health policy making
- Children's health can be improved by energy transition

Energy transition as a challenge for public health

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sector's awareness of energy choices and energy related policies has prompted global action to phase out all fossil fuels as soon as possible. For example, EU hospitals are responsible for roughly 5% of the annual carbon dioxide emissions, while the health sector, as a whole, has a considerable carbon footprint.

Worldwide energy production, particularly use of fossil fuels for electricity, accounts for about a one third of total greenhouse-gas emissions, thus contributing to climate change and its adverse health consequences, including the high costs to health systems in many regions.

The role of public health is crucial and should be devoted to: increasing patient's literacy about healthy energy choices and energy transition, increasing responsible energy use in health sector, supporting decision-makers in clean energy transition, rise importance of search for new solutions.

In order to prevent number of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, clean energy choices and energy efficiency measures in every sector, including health, must come as mainstream. Advocacy for healthy energy choices and energy transition as public health priority and sustainable healthcare is needed. Public health should lead by their own effort and behavior in energy transition, changing mindset process and supporting energy sector with educational sector in long term goal – to make energy transition possible.

Choose Health - How we can stop fuelling disease

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The costs to health stemming from the resulting air pollution, climate change and environmental degradation are not carried by the industry but paid by society: For every billion dollars the world's richest 20 governments spend on fossil fuel subsidies more than 10,000 people die of air pollution.

Subsidising this harmful industry at a time when fossil fuels need to stay under the ground, damages public health by increasing air pollution and the health risks associated with climate change, but it also puts a burden on health systems and public budgets overall by locking in billions of funds that could be used more efficiently for services such as universal health coverage, better education or overall poverty reduction.

The good news is that we have alternative options. The transition to renewables such as wind, solar or hydropower is possible already today. Reforming subsidies could result in a 50% decrease of premature deaths worldwide. It is not solely less fossil fuels that brings health benefits- the renewable energies that will take their place will not only decrease carbon emissions but have their own positive health implications.

... paving the way for renewable, clean energy choices and their multiple health benefits.

Perspective on children's public health and energy transition

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Children need access to clean energy, water and sanitation to support good health. Actions to address clean energy, water, sanitation and hygiene issues work towards the goals of Sustainable Development Goals, but also prevent child deaths from a range of diseases. Children should breathe fresh air and live pneumonia-free with clean energy for home and industrial use.

Improving children's health and reducing environmental risks should be at the heart of sustainable development and energy transition. Every SDG relates to an element of children's environmental health and energy use on the planet.

The transition to other forms of energy production, such as wind, solar or hydropower could result in a decrease of premature deaths in children. Fossil fuels are specifically

harmful to children. The financial burden on the health system by unclean energy forms is unequally costly for children. While the renewable energies will not only decrease carbon emissions, they have their own positive health implications. Furthermore, energy poverty, good lighting for education, clean transportation, comfortable heating and cooling all play a key role in children's development and well-being.

A UNICEF report on climate change adaptation in five developing countries concludes that children are mainly cited in policy frameworks only in the context of being a vulnerable group. Their potential to contribute is mostly neglected, which hints at a lack of awareness of the benefits of including children and young people among national policy-makers.

Social barriers in the context of the energy sector face the risk of being neglected in global and national negotiations and decision-making, as well as in programme planning that is intended to benefit local populations, including women and children. Thus, we need to include social aspects in largescale projects such as hydropower and geothermal developments.

Child specific policy recommendations are presented.