

**LOOKING FORWARD TO COP28**  
**FRAMING THE CLIMATE CRISIS AS A HEALTH CRISIS**

By Clare Langley-Hawthorne, M.A (Econ.), LL.M  
October 24, 2023

This year the COP28 UAE Presidency, in collaboration with WHO, the Wellcome Trust and partners, will host the first-ever Health Day at the COP28 UN Climate Conference in Dubai. This marks the first time COP has dedicated an entire day to the health impacts of climate change addressing the urgent need to address the health implications of climate change and an important opportunity to frame the climate crisis as a health crisis.

Since 2016, when growing concern among physicians about the adverse effects of climate change on human health led to the founding of the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and health, the global health community has been calling on nations to officially address health as part of the COP process. The international political and economic situation, however, remains fraught, with the issue of climate change continuing to be a politically polarizing issue, particularly in the United States which faces a crucial presidential election year in 2024. How much this will affect negotiations at COP28 remains to be seen but there is a heightened awareness of the human health risks to vulnerable populations as we record (once again) one of the hottest years in human history. In light of this, as well as increased international conflict and unrest, it is timely to look forward to COP28 to consider the ways in which the global health impacts of climate change can be addressed.

The COP28 Health Day occurs on December 5, 2023, and will focus on five key areas:

1. Showcasing the evidence base and impact pathways between climate change and human health;
2. Promoting the benefits to human health of arguments for climate action, including the and health co-benefits of mitigation;
3. Highlighting the need for (and barriers to) strengthening climate resilience of health systems;

4. Identifying and scaling adaptation measures to address the impacts of climate change on human health; and
5. Identifying actions that can be taken at the nexus of health and relief, recovery and peace.

These critical issues should be front and center in any climate negotiations and the fact that there is a day dedicated to health in a climate context needs to be applauded. It represents however only the first step in many to highlight how climate change affects human health, paving the way for addressing the multifaceted challenges to follow. These challenges include understanding and incorporating healthcare climate actions within the current global political, economic, and financial context. There are many issues that surround how to frame climate and health within a G20 context as well as how to strengthen the role of development banks and other financial institutions considering global political and financial commitments and climate change measures, including emission reduction targets.

While the outcome of COP28 negotiations when it comes to the climate driven health crisis, remains to be seen, the fact that health is finally on the agenda, should be applauded. The health case for climate action is compelling, both in terms of the overwhelming benefits to human health as well as the economic costs of inaction. International consensus that we need to take climate action to save human lives is a powerful force for global change. Let us hope that Health Day at COP28 is the catalyst for just such a change.