

# PACIFIC HEADS OF HEALTH

*Réunion des directeurs de la santé du Pacifique*

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## **PACIFIC CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH NETWORK**

(Paper presented by the Ministry of Health of Fiji Islands)

### **Introduction**

1. Anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases have caused rapid global warming at a rate unprecedented in the past 2,000 years. It is observed that this increased rate of global warming has been accompanied by increases in the frequency and intensity of extremes events over most land regions for more than 50 years. The climate crises is one of the greatest threats to human health in the 21st century.
2. The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are prone to the impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise, cyclones, and floods. Forecast models predict an increase in both dry and wet season rainfall with an increased risk of extreme rainfall days. The increase in extreme weather events such as floods and prolonged dry weather is expected to influence disease patterns. Climate change is affecting health, and it will continue to affect the social and environmental determinants of health: clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food, and secure shelter. The potential impacts of climate change on human health and infrastructure raises concern amongst health leaders, particularly those in public health, advocating for the prevention of communicable and noncommunicable diseases and infrastructure fields. Increasing infrastructure damage due to extreme events exacerbates the existing health sector challenges.
3. A new WHO global strategy on health, environment and climate change was approved by member states in 2019 at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual World Health Assembly for 2019–2023, outlining the transformation needed to improve lives and well-being sustainably through healthy environments. With SIDS being extremely vulnerable to climate change and its potential health impacts, WHO Member States approved a WHO global plan of action on climate change and health in SIDS in 2019 for 2019–2023. There is potential for PICs to respond well to more systematic and simpler network support that underscores actions towards building climate resilience in the health systems.
4. Most of the climate change impacts on health can be avoided through a combination of strengthening health system and improving management of the risks presented by climate change. It is urgent to prepare health sectors for the impacts of climate change.

## Background

5. At the UNFCCC COP23 in Bonn, a Special Initiative on Climate Change and Health in SIDS was launched in collaboration with UNFCCC and the Fijian Presidency of the COP23. At COP26 in Glasgow, health took a more prominent role which led 77 member countries to make health commitments that became the underpinning for the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACH).

6. In 2023, at the COP28 in Dubai, for the first time a dedicated health day was observed leading to the endorsement of the UAE Declaration on Climate and Health by 122 countries including 10 countries from the Pacific. There was a strong presence of the health community in national and regional delegations, and they were also part of the negotiation process at COP28. The need to address the climate change and health nexus of vulnerable SIDS, including the Pacific Islands was highlighted, hence implementing actions aligned to the UAE Declaration on Climate and Health for security of the health sector is essential.

7. Pacific SIDS have been leading the actions in climate change and health and had developed a Pacific Islands Action Plan for Climate Change and Health (PIAP-CCH) in 2018 which calls on regional health leaders in the Pacific to establish a coordinating platform/mechanism for concerted efforts and shared resources and best practices to accelerate building climate resilience in health sectors of the Pacific. In 2021, Pacific Heads of Health at its 12<sup>th</sup> session agreed to prioritize climate change actions in health to complement the commitments made at the 13<sup>th</sup> Pacific Health Ministers' Meeting in French Polynesia. The two forums highlighted the pivotal role of shared resources and information for building climate resilience in Pacific health sectors.

8. The proposed network will enhance information sharing amongst Pacific SIDs health leaders empowering them to build climate resilience of their country's health sector. The network will be propelled by Pacific SIDs health leaders deriving guidance from the Declaration and the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACH) from a SIDS lens. Acknowledging the numerous similarities in Pacific SIDS' challenges and threats the proposed network provides the platform for mutual assistance and support.

## Goal and Objectives

9. Overall Goal: To empower Heads of Health in Pacific SIDs, in acknowledging their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, realize the agreement made at the 12th Pacific Heads of Health and the commitments in COP28 UAE Declaration on Climate and Health where health leaders committed to convene regularly with diverse line-ministries and stakeholders to foster synergies and strengthen national and multilateral collaboration on climate change and health, including through the ATACH initiative.

10. Specific Objectives:

- i. Support member countries realize and act on the agreements of the 12<sup>th</sup> Pacific Heads of Health Meeting which reflected Health Ministers commitment at the 13<sup>th</sup> Pacific Health Ministers' Meeting.
- ii. Support member countries realize and act on the commitments in the COP28 UAE Declaration.
- iii. Promote actions that ensure better health outcomes, including through the transformation of health systems to be climate-resilient, low-carbon, sustainable and equitable, and to better prepare communities and the most vulnerable populations for the impacts of climate change.
- iv. Facilitate mechanisms for accessing and utilizing climate finance for health.
- v. Serve as the CCH hub for the Pacific that provides the platform for sharing of knowledge, experiences, and innovations in raising climate and health actions ensuring a collective response to climate crises without leaving anyone behind.

### Recommendations

- That the members of the Pacific Heads of Health (PHoH) endorse the proposal for a Pacific Climate Change and Health Network.
  - That the members of the PHoH acknowledges the chair to lead the Network.
  - That the members of the PHoH shall support the process for the establishment of the Network.
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