

Letters

Greater action on climate change by physicians needed

A landmark editorial appeared in *CMAJ* as part of a coordinated global call to action alongside 220 respected health journals worldwide, including *Lancet*, *BMJ* and *NEJM*.¹ The initiative consolidates the growing voice of health care providers globally, providing education on the risks to the planet of the escalating environmental crisis of climate change combined with biodiversity loss, while advocating for the massive action emergently needed to secure a livable future for humanity.

The authoritative 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report unequivocally links climate change to human activity.² The United Nations calls the evidence-based IPCC projections of the devastation if we fail to limit global warming a “code red for humanity.” Climate change is the greatest threat to human health of our lifetimes.³

Despite this, the Canadian Medical Association’s own recent “four pillars” of health care policy priorities prepared for the 2021 Canadian Federal Election did not identify environmental health as an actual pillar.⁴ A “climate change plan” briefly mentioning adaptation only, with no mention of mitigation, was relegated

to the fine print. Likewise, most doctors recently surveyed by the Ontario Medical Association failed to recognize climate health as a priority.^{5,6} We are falling dangerously short of a coordinated call to action.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted our interdependences and deep vulnerabilities. However, we risk incomparably greater harm if we fail to stabilize the environment that sustains us. COVID-19 has also shown us what we can accomplish when we urgently work together, while focusing public attention on trusted medical advice on a daily basis. We now have an opportunity and collective responsibility as health professionals to address the environmental crisis with the urgency and unprecedented massive scale of action needed to secure our future in the brief time remaining to act.

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