

## Communiqué on Combining Climate Change and NCD Prevention from the 2<sup>nd</sup> WUN Global Health Justice Network Workshop held, Sydney, Australia 5-7 May 2011

### Rationale

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are not only a health problem, they are a sustainability and human development disaster. They are inextricably linked to the global environmental and economic crisis. Their impact on human capital is inexorable.

The United Nations General Assembly's unanimous decision in 2010 to hold a UN High Level Meeting on NCDs in September 2011 signals growing government recognition and concern about the impact of the global emergency arising from diabetes, heart disease and stroke, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases and their modifiable antecedent risks. These diseases are closely associated with mental illness and result in untold personal suffering and grave social and economic hardship. Individually and collectively they are major causes of poverty and lost productivity and pose a significant barrier, not only to human development, but also to global economic stability and prosperity.

These diseases form a substantial component of a broader global sustainability predicament that threatens economic and environmental sustainability and human capital. Their modifiable causes, particularly physical inactivity and under-or over-nutrition, go hand in hand with social inequality and with vectors of climate change such as over-urbanisation, poor urban design, sedentary automated work and play, and unhealthy food grown or manufactured through carbon intense food production methods. Many aspects of these things can be mitigated or ameliorated through laws. Yet, despite the obvious direct and indirect links between NCDs and climate change, the confluence remains under-examined in both global health and climate change research. Consequently, the Global Health Justice Network of the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) met in Sydney on 5-7 May 2011 to consider how these issues might be addressed.

### Purpose

The meeting brought together academic researchers from a range of disciplines including law, medicine and public health, the social sciences, environmental science, nutrition, psychology, policy, politics, and philosophy from academic institutions in the UK, the USA, Canada, the West Indies, and Australia. Its purpose was to explore, debate and identify key research deficits and priorities at the interface between NCDs and climate change to which the law might be applied to mitigate current and/or future harms and achieve co-benefits.

### Process

Drawing on the 2008 *Sydney Resolution* ([www.oxha.org](http://www.oxha.org)) which called for urgent action on NCDs and their environmental vectors, delegates considered knowledge and evidence deficits that currently hinder progress on NCDs and climate change and exacerbate social injustice. The debate was anchored in the elements and components of optimally healthy and environmentally friendly:

- Places
- Food
- Business
- Public policy
- Societies

## **Agreed priority areas**

Five overarching research areas were identified as priorities on the basis of their i) capacity to impact positively one or more aspects of the intersect between climate change and NCDs, ii) amenability to mitigation through legal and ethical frameworks and governance systems and, iii) potential to contribute to addressing critical deficits in our knowledge and understanding of how to mitigate the current NCD and climate change crisis. They are:

### **1. *Global and national policy***

Can NCDs and climate change be integrated at the global and national level and how are NCD interventions justified by (and to) governments to assist them in balancing health and environmental gains versus restrictions on personal/corporate freedoms? This would require engaging all levels of government, civil service and civil society in systematically 'visioning' the goals of society globally and in determining which overarching principles have supremacy over others. For example, should health and/or climate change take precedence over economic growth or vice versa.

### **2. *Food systems***

How can food systems from 'paddock to plate / farm to fork' be re-engineered to maximise nutrition and minimise environmental harm. This would require researching:

- the magnitude /extent of food waste
- the utility of using food waste to make biofuels
- the intergenerational safety and/or harms of genetically modified food
- the impact on human health of food manufactured or produced with nanotechnology
- the benefits and harms for NCDs, the environment and local economies of localising food production and consumption
- the relative effectiveness of various strategies for averting the anticipated global food crisis eg containing population growth versus reducing overconsumption.

### **3. *Corporate social responsibility (CSR)***

How can corporations be incentivised and enabled to deliver an integrated approach to improving health (specifically with regard to measures of NCD risk) and reducing carbon emissions and environmental damage more broadly?

- do CSR principles and rhetoric match what corporations do in reality?
- can/should governments and agencies such as the International Standards Organisation set stricter obligations for corporations to integrate and report on environmental and health impacts/outcomes as a condition of their registration?
- should international trade law agreements include more specific exceptions allowing and protecting public and environmental interest regulation?

### **4. *Health in all policies***

How effective is a 'health in all policies approach' in mitigating NCDs and climate change? How do various government sectors understand, address, operationalise considerations of climate change and NCDs within their mandate? What influences them to do so? This would include the development of reliable audit tools to monitor each sector's response to health and climate change.

### **5. *Regulatory interventions***

What is the impact on behaviour change of specific regulatory interventions eg:

- would mandatory labelling of foods with their carbon footprint change people's purchasing behaviour in favour of health and environmental considerations?
- does mixed density housing reduce vectors of climate change and NCDs?

Additional critical issues were identified around urbanisation, social inequity /distributive justice, adaptation to climate change and dwindling natural resources. These, together with the areas above, are being refined into specific research questions through an international Delphi Process designed to canvass the expertise, insights and professional wisdom of researchers from the broad spectrum of disciplines working at the interface between NCDs and climate change.

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Delegates at the 2<sup>nd</sup> WUN Global Health Justice Network Workshop were drawn from the following institutions and organisations: Australian National University, National Heart Foundation Australia, NSW Health Department, Australia, Union for International Cancer Control, Penn State University USA, The University of Sydney Australia, University of Alberta Canada, University of Bristol UK, University of Leeds UK, University of Queensland Australia, University of Western Australia, University of the West Indies.

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