



Short communication

Six months on from Glasgow, the health commitments made at COP26 enter a new phase

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It has been six months since the COP26 UN climate conference took place in Glasgow, Scotland, where governments renewed their commitment to the goals of the Paris Agreement under the banner of a 'Glasgow climate pact' [1].

Half a year later, thousands of government representatives, climate experts and activists gathered again, this time at the headquarters of UN climate change in Bonn, Germany [2]. The meeting, known as an "intersessional", takes place every year in the German city, midway between the annual conferences of the parties (COPs) which fall towards the end of the year. In the span of 2 weeks, from June 6 to 16, diplomats from 197 countries laid the groundwork for the next UN climate conference later this year; COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

The health community had its most visible role yet at the Glasgow COP, with a record number of health professionals at the conference advocating for climate commitments that would "protect health, save lives, and advance equity", while an official health programme was included in the portfolio of the COP presidency [3].

This COP26 health programme delivered a watershed moment for health sector engagement on climate action, with over 50 countries committed to transform their health systems to be climate resilient and low carbon [4]. Since then, that number has steadily grown to almost 60 countries, and the Group of 7 richest economies has encouraged governments to join the initiative [5].

On June 13, 2022, at an official side event of the UN climate conference in Bonn, the World Health Organization (WHO) provided an update on the progress made on the COP26 health commitments. "We very much continue to encourage countries to join this initiative, but it is even more important that those countries that have already committed are being supported", said Dr. Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, who leads the climate change and health team within the Public Health and Environment department at the World Health Organization (WHO).

"That is why WHO, in partnership with the governments of the United Kingdom and Egypt, and many others, is launching the Al-

liance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health, or ATACH," Dr. Campbell-Lendrum continued.

This next phase of the initiative will be officially launched on June 27th, and will function as a collaborative platform to help countries deliver on their COP26 health commitments.

"The alliance will provide the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences, it will monitor the delivery of these commitments, identify best practice, help countries with accessing finance, and develop policies and plans," explained Chris Carter, Deputy Director at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

Measuring progress

In a recent review of the COP26 health commitments, Blom et al. argue that the country commitments are only the requisite first step for action. Implementation of the commitments cannot be guaranteed without having country-specific policy development, accountability mechanisms, and financing in place [6].

"There is currently still very limited transparency, and the accountability measures are also unclear. [Monitoring these commitments] can create an active feedback loop between countries and the WHO to strengthen future activities around the commitments and tailor such activities to a specific country's needs," said co-author Amanda Quintana in response to the June 13 event.

"Programmes of decarbonising must be built around data, annual targets, and tough accountability," said Nick Watts, the chief sustainability officer of the UK National Health Service (NHS) [7]. The NHS recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with WHO, in which the two organizations agreed to cooperate on activities to promote and facilitate the decarbonization of healthcare systems around the world [8]. In 2020, the UK NHS became the first healthcare system in the world to commit to net zero emissions. It is delivering on that pledge through significant emissions reductions already, despite the COVID-19 pandemic [9].

Beyond the UK NHS' pioneering efforts, however, little information is currently available on whether any countries have made progress in implementing their COP26 health commitments.

One bright spot when it comes to recent progress is the United States. The US Department of Health and Human Services has set up an Office of Climate Change and Health Equity earlier this year, in order to support implementation of its health commitment, and has made its first point of call the "transparent reporting on progress". Other early priorities for the department include: capacity building within the US health system; measuring and identify evidence-based practices for reducing emissions and promoting sustainability; and the creation of new regulations and standards of care [10]. Carter points out that it is these kind of case studies and experiences the ATACH initiative hopes to share and learn from in order to stimulate collaboration between countries and sectors

Acknowledging the need for improved monitoring of progress, Dr. Campbell-Lendrum from WHO concluded the June 13 event by adding: "We are currently still in the position of welcoming countries to join the initiative, of making it easy for governments to sign up. Over time, we hope to ratchet up ambition and raise the quality standards. We will be building on WHO's existing monitoring efforts and technical support packages to help countries deliver on transformative health sector action."

The 2021 Glasgow climate summit was clear turning point for health sector engagement on climate action, and the after-effects were tangible at the Bonn climate talks in June 2022. Governments and health actors have committed to respond to the climate emergency. The question at COP27 in November will be: have they delivered on those promises?

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Arthur Wyns reports a relationship with World Health Organization that includes: employment.

Arthur Wyns reports a relationship with Climate and Health Alliance that includes: employment.

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