POLICY BRIEF

Climate change and health in the Caribbean
An agenda for action

Introduction

Caribbean small island developing states (SIDS) face climate change hazards, including flooding, drought, increased hurricane intensity, extreme heat, and sea level rise. The health of Caribbean people is threatened directly by these hazards, and indirectly by features of SIDS that affect health systems' capacities to respond, including the small human resource base, economic fragility, and concentration of populations and infrastructure near coastlines. This policy brief offers guidance to policymakers on strategies for strengthening the response to climate change and health (CC&H) challenges, based on:

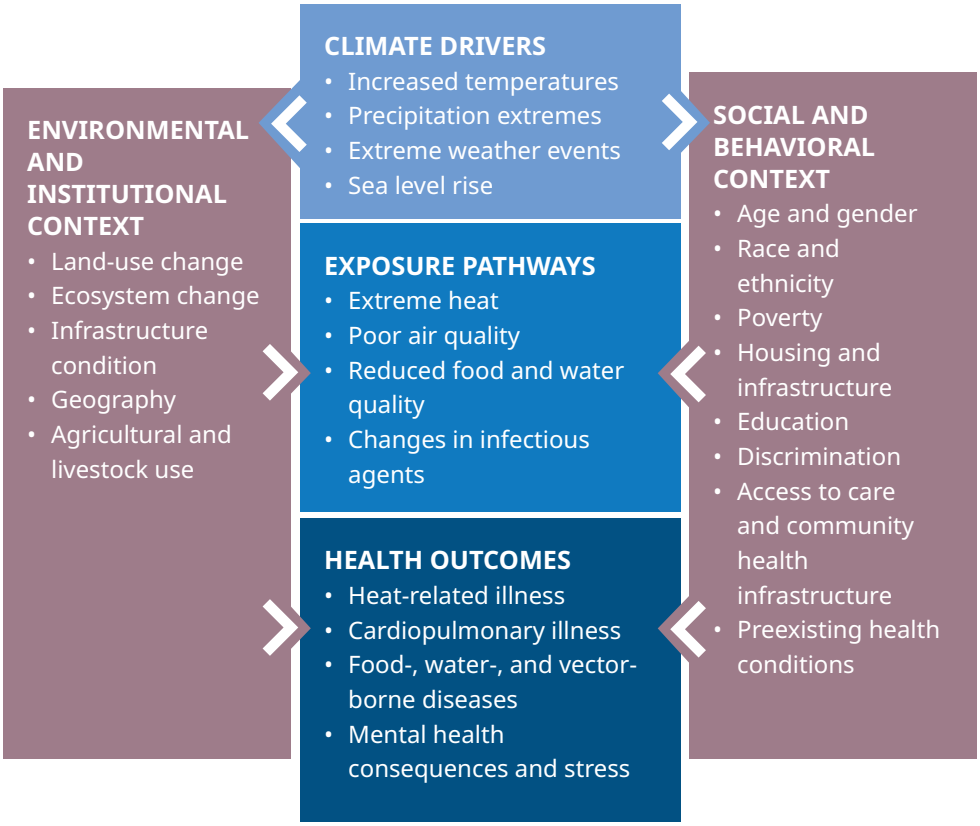
1. A regional consultation process, which identified 18 priority areas for action (shown on the next page); and
2. Review of Caribbean evidence on each of the priority areas *(1)*.

The Agenda for Action on Climate Change and Health in the Caribbean *(2)* includes chapters on each priority area showing what is happening, what should be done, and what we need to know to achieve climate-resilient health systems. It was informed by the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1, illustrating the pathways between CC&H.

The Agenda shows that Caribbean government and civil society leaders are at the forefront in advocating for action on CC&H globally. However, there are difficulties in translating commitments into action. Gaps in Caribbean CC&H research and surveillance can hinder progress.

FIGURE 1

Pathways between climate change and health



Source: USGCRP, 2016: The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment. Crimmins, A., J. Balbus, J.L. Gamble, C.B. Beard, J.E. Bell, D. Dodgen, R.J. Eisen, N. Fann, M.D. Hawkins, S.C. Herring, L. Jantarasami, D.M. Mills, S. Saha, M.C. Sarofim, J. Trtanj, and L. Ziska, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC.

Recommendations at a glance

1. **Collaborate across disciplines, sectors, and agencies to address CC&H.**
2. **Provide leadership for coordinated CC&H action.**
3. **Empower the health workforce to address CC&H.**
4. **Establish and enforce CC&H-promoting legislation, and policy.**
5. **Strengthen research and surveillance capacity.**
6. **Research adverse health impacts of climate change in the Caribbean context.**
7. **Conduct research to find out what works in addressing CC&H challenges.**
8. **Make health care more climate resilient.**
9. **Invest in green initiatives with health co-benefits.**
10. **Partner to maximize CC&H resources and resilience.**
11. **Provide dedicated CC&H budgets.**
12. **Increase awareness and share evidence.**

Recommendations for action



Collaborate across disciplines, sectors, and agencies to address CC&H

Initiatives to address CC&H challenges should involve meteorological, environmental, and health experts; public, private, civil society, and academic representatives; and government officials responsible for health-determining sectors such as food and agriculture, water, construction, energy, environment, finance, marine resources, trade, transport, and utilities.



Provide leadership for coordinated CC&H action

Ensure that the health sector is integrated into climate change decision-making and that health policies address climate change. Establish CC&H collaborative mechanisms between international, regional, national, and local government entities. Share data to build collective knowledge and joint strategies.



Empower the health workforce to address CC&H

Partner with educational institutions to build health professionals' capacities to recognize and treat health conditions impacted by climate change hazards. Enhance policymakers' and government officers' knowledge and skills in evidence-based CC&H adaptation and mitigation measures. Support communications, meteorology, and statistics training to strengthen information for action. Include responsibilities for addressing CC&H in job descriptions. Provide workers with equipment, supplies, and climate-resilient facilities to address CC&H.



Establish and enforce CC&H-promoting legislation, and policy

Protect citizens through laws and regulations. Areas for legislation and enforcement include climate-resilient building codes, pollution controls, water and sanitation services, air and food quality standards, protection of land and ocean biodiversity, environmental impact assessments, and equal opportunities for all. Integrate health into climate change and emergency management policies and procedures. Establish community participation mechanisms for social and gender equity in CC&H-related policymaking. Address social determinants of health, such as poverty, lack of education, and access to climate-resilient housing.



Strengthen research and surveillance capacity

Invest in local CC&H research and surveillance skills-building, personnel, institutions, equipment, technology, projects, and programs to develop appropriate and effective Caribbean solutions to CC&H challenges. Integrate climate and health information systems.



Research adverse health impacts of climate change in the Caribbean context

Address research gaps on how climate change affects health in the Caribbean. Strengthen the evidence base to quantify health impact, inform appropriate and effective action, and monitor changes over time.



Conduct research to find out what works in addressing CC&H challenges

Research the effectiveness, costs, and benefits of CC&H interventions. Document, monitor, and evaluate national and regional CC&H action and policy. Study their implementation to identify barriers and facilitating factors. Investigate how to adapt CC&H practices proven effective globally to the Caribbean context. Publish and share Caribbean examples of good practice.



Make health care more climate-resilient

Build and maintain climate-smart health facilities. Be environmentally sound in providing health care, using renewable energy, minimizing pollution and waste, and using water and other resources efficiently. Develop systems to deliver health services in emergency situations, especially to vulnerable communities, including disaster shelters. Develop and adopt effective and cost-efficient medical products and technologies to respond to climate-sensitive health conditions in the Caribbean. Train health professionals in climate-responsive healthcare delivery.



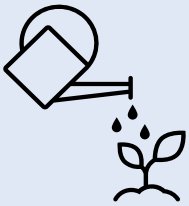
Invest in green initiatives with health co-benefits

Reduce pollution, excess heat, and greenhouse gas emissions while boosting physical and mental health by increasing green spaces and water features in urban areas; supporting active transport (walking and cycling); reducing, reusing, and recycling waste; harvesting rainwater; providing fiscal incentives for and investing in renewable energy and electric vehicles; reducing oceanic and land pollution; and protecting coastal zones. Promote plant-rich diets to reduce carbon footprints, obesity, and noncommunicable diseases.



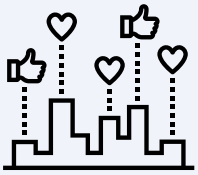
Partner to maximize CC&H resources and resilience

Reduce dependence on external and short-term funding while enhancing Caribbean and South–South financial collaboration to optimize local impact. Foster and support civil society and private sector partnerships. Create and share a database of funding opportunities relevant to Caribbean SIDS. Enhance funding application skills. Partner with economists to conduct cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analyses of CC&H action. Invest in climate-resilient, environmentally sustainable infrastructure and health facilities. Support/create grant programs for climate and health research appropriate to the Caribbean.



Provide dedicated CC&H budgets

Dedicate funding to health sector adaptation, mitigation, research, and human resource development and to integrating health in the climate change response. Advocate for funding streams to respond to SIDS' vulnerabilities. Improve access to funding opportunities by incorporating CC&H considerations into disaster reduction and management initiatives. Strengthen integration of health into Nationally Determined Contributions with specific actions and budget proposals.



Increase awareness and share evidence

Educate the public and policymakers on CC&H. Enhance understanding by using real-world health scenarios and human-interest stories. Improve science communication with specific audiences through community participation, direct engagement, traditional media, and social media. Develop early warning systems that include likely health consequences of climate change events such as flooding, along with advice on protective measures. Increase publication of Caribbean research to elevate the region's profile in global CC&H policymaking. Engage Caribbean media.

18 PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION ON CC&H IN THE CARIBBEAN

Domain 1: Climate change health impacts, exposures, and vulnerability

1. Health impacts of extreme weather events
2. Vulnerability to vector-borne diseases
3. Water, sanitation, and hygiene
4. Noncommunicable diseases
5. Air quality
6. Heat-related illness
7. Mental health
8. Population displacement and migration
9. Distribution, equity, and justice

Domain 2: Adaptation, planning, and resilience for health

10. Collaboration between agencies
11. Research and surveillance
12. Agriculture, food safety and security
13. Awareness and skills-building

Domain 3: Mitigation action and health co-benefits

14. Marine resources and health
15. Climate-friendly, health-promoting infrastructure
16. Smart health facilities

Domain 4: Resources and engagement for action

17. Funding streams
18. Government engagement

References

1. Hassan S, Philippe C, West RM, McFarlane S, Polson-Edwards K, Gordon-Strachan G, et al. Development of an agenda for research and action on climate change and health in the Caribbean. Rev Panam Salud Publica. 2025;49:e4. Available from: https://doi.org/10.26633/rpsp.2025.4.
2. Allen CF, West RM, Gordon-Strachan G, Hassan S, McFarlane S, Polson-Edwards K, et al. Research for Action on Climate Change and Health in the Caribbean: A public, private, people's and planetary agenda. [Port of Spain]: Research for Action on Climate Change and Health in the Caribbean Project; 2024. Available from: https://earthmedic.com/research-for-action-on-climate-change-and-health-in-the-caribbean/.

About the Agenda

The Agenda for Action on CC&H in the Caribbean *(2)* arose from a commitment by Caribbean citizens, health professionals, and researchers to address the profound threats to regional health posed by climate change. It was developed by a group comprising civil society, academic, and multilateral agency representatives from the Caribbean and North America. In 2021, the group organized the online Conference on Climate Change and Health in Small Island Developing States: Focus on the Caribbean, which was supported by more than 25 regional and international organizations and attended by 162 presenters and 642 participants from 80 countries. This Agenda was formulated by prioritizing research areas, synthesizing evidence from conference presentations and scientific literature, and holding consultations with government and other stakeholders and experts *(1)*.

Thanks are extended by the authors of the Agenda, comprising representatives of the agencies shown in the icons below, to all participants in the conference and consultations and the agencies that supported these activities.

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