Overview presentation

20th August 2021

web: climatecares.co.uk  twitter: @climatecares
Executive Summary

Climate change is a mental health emergency. There are mounting numbers of people experiencing new or worsened psychological distress in the aftermath of a flood or wildfire, when suffering through extreme heat, or when witnessing the unfolding climate crisis. Without action, we risk increasing deaths by suicide, on-going severe distress, PTSD, anxiety and depression, and mental health systems incapacitated by climate shocks. With action, multiple "win-wins" are possible to tackle climate and mental health together, producing healthier, more just and resilient communities.

The Institute of Global Health Innovation and the Grantham Institute at Imperial College London, through their programme Climate Cares, are already working to generate the knowledge, awareness and action required to create a more just, mentally healthy and safer climate future. With our world-leading expertise across policy, research and design in our globally-connected health and climate change institutes, we are uniquely positioned to address the challenge.

Although the health impacts of climate change are receiving increasing attention, including from funders, the mental health aspects have been left behind. This lack of consideration is staggering when considering the impacts: in a disaster, the number of people affected psychologically outnumbers those experiencing physical injury by an estimated 40:1. These hidden mental health costs must receive their true "parity of esteem" with physical health.

We are seeking a total investment of £3m to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Climate Cares initiative. In the short-term, we are seeking an investment of £1m to:

- Create metrics to establish, track and respond to the mental health impacts of climate change globally and evaluate interventions
- Co-design, implement and evaluate interventions to address eco-anxiety and promote agency and action in different global settings
- Build a global network of researchers, healthcare practitioners, community leaders, decision makers and those with lived experience to share knowledge and resources that will inform best practice and policy change
- Develop open-access training programmes on climate change and mental health that could reach thousands of health practitioners, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders
"When you talk about climate change and mental health, most people don't put two and two together."

Member of the public
Climate change both **directly and indirectly impacts** mental health outcomes. Including increasing suicide rates, diagnoses of mental disorders such as PTSD, substance abuse, depression and anxiety, following from extreme distress and trauma. Climate change is also understandably associated with a range of strong emotions.
The **impact** of climate change on mental health

Challenges affecting our planet also affect our minds, communities and systems.

**Direct impacts**

Such as heat waves, flooding, droughts or bushfires, can lead to higher rates of mental illness, suicide, and higher mortality for those with pre-existing mental disorders.

*The 1995 UK heatwave saw a 49.6% increase in suicide*

**Indirect impacts**

Such as witnessing your homeland change or reading about climate change in the news, can cause feelings of grief, anxiety and distress, particularly in young people (e.g. eco-anxiety).

**System impacts**

Climate change simultaneously increases need while disrupting capacity in our health systems, and compounds existing inequalities. We lack the resilience and adaptation preparedness required at all levels of society.
The literature shows that:

- There is a clear relationship between increased temperatures and number of suicides
- There is clear evidence for severe distress following extreme weather events
- People who meet criteria for mental illness are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change on physical as well as mental health
- The climate crisis threatens to disrupt the provision of care for people with a mental illness diagnosis
- Climate change exacerbates mental distress, particularly among young people, even for individuals who are not directly affected (e.g. ‘eco-anxiety’).
Who is the most affected

It is essential to engage with multiple groups, from communities to organisations, to understand their needs and how are they affected.

- **Children and young people**
- **Activists**
- **Climate scientists and professionals**
- **Schools and teachers**
- **Directly affected**
- **Parents**
- **Indigenous peoples**
- **Decision makers**

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**Reports of how climate change impacts mental health**

There are increasing reports of a wide range of psychological impacts on people experiencing or aware of climate change.

| "We are people of the sea ice and if there's no more sea ice, how do we be people of the sea ice?" |
| Inuit in Canada, Elder, Rigolet, Nunatsiavut |
| 3 in 5 children in the UK are worried about the impact climate change will have on their lives *BBC Newsround, 2020* |
| One in two Americans believe global warming will harm people in their community, and one in four are "very worried" about climate change. *Climate Change in the American Mind, 2021* |
| "[It] would be like a death. Yeah, there would be a grieving process because the farm embodies everything that the family farm is. And I think if we were to lose it, it would be like losing a person but it would be sadder than losing a person." |
| Australian Farmer |

Inattention to mental health is of particular concern in the field of climate change given the evidence that psychological impacts from any form of disaster exceed physical injury by 40–1. *Hayes et al. 2018*

Pre-existing mental disorders can **triple the risk** of dying during a heat wave *Thompson et al. 2018*
Our state of mind also impacts the state of our world.

The climate and ecological crises are fundamentally attributable to human behaviours and psychology. Generating individual and system change requires an awareness of the interaction between our psychological response to crises and taking action.
Common causes, common solutions

There are key parallels between the world we need to create for a safe climate, and that which supports mental wellbeing. Many co-benefits exist within our travel, energy, food, social and healthcare systems.
Our unique opportunity

The evidence to date presents a compelling picture of the significant and widespread impact climate change has and will have on mental health and emotional wellbeing. These impacts are currently “hidden costs”, largely unquantified and unaccounted for in policy and practice. However, research has not kept pace with anecdotal reports or grass roots efforts, and as such there is still much we don’t know about the prevalence, nature and severity of a wide range of climate change related mental health impacts, and what works best to respond.

The need for more systematic research

We need to better understand both the system level mental health costs of climate inaction, and the system level mental health benefits of action.

We need to understand who is affected, how and in what ways.

We need to understand what individual and community support, what interventions and what narratives, are most appropriate and effective.

The need for preventative interventions

We need to work with affected people and communities to develop appropriate support.

We need to collaboratively develop and test ways to mobilise mindsets and build resilient communities able to navigate, cope with and respond to our changing world, and help seed a mentally healthy, safer climate future.

The needs for widespread engagement and policy change

We need a cross-sector, multidisciplinary international community to share knowledge and drive action.

We need to develop blueprints for action and work with decision makers to affect change.

We need to work with affected people and communities to develop appropriate support.

We need to collaboratively develop and test ways to mobilise mindsets and build resilient communities able to navigate, cope with and respond to our changing world, and help seed a mentally healthy, safer climate future.

We need to develop blueprints for action and work with decision makers to affect change.
Climate Cares is an ongoing and proposed interdisciplinary programme of work that aims to understand and support mental health outcomes in the current climate and ecological crises.

**Workstream 1**
**Evidence base**
Build an evidence base to understand the prevalence, nature and severity of psychological responses to awareness of the crisis, the win-win relationship with climate action, and appropriate intervention targets.

**Workstream 2**
**Preventative interventions**
Co-design, evaluate and scale preventative mental health interventions to support vulnerable individuals and communities to become resilient in times of crisis.

**Workstream 3**
**Policy change**
Develop and disseminate policy guidelines and best practice principles to educate healthcare practitioners and trigger health systems and policy change across the globe.

**web:** climatecares.co.uk  
**twitter:** @climatecares
Changing Worlds Study: Survey

In 2020 we launched our first study that surveyed 530 young people (16 - 24 years old) across the UK to understand their psychological responses, mental health and sense of agency for the dual challenges of climate change and a global pandemic.

We found UK young people were significantly more distressed by climate change than COVID-19, even though the former had less direct impact on their lives.

Our first paper is in pre-print in the Lancet Planetary Health
Workstream 1
Evidence base

**WORKSTREAM STRATEGY**

**SHORT TERM**
Changing worlds pilot study
- Survey 500 young people (16-24) across the UK
- 2+ academic papers published
- Disseminate research findings

Temperature impacts on mental health
- Systematic review and meta-analysis

**MEDIUM TERM**
Globalise survey, and evaluate interventions and policy
- Adapt survey for global settings (with local young people): India, Philippines, Caribbean, USA
- Compare global results, and begin to tailor, implement and evaluate local responses in both policy and interventions
- Publish academic papers with collaborators

**LONG TERM**
Digital dashboard and annual global survey
- Co-design global dashboard to convene and share evidence and current best practices in accessible formats with different stakeholders
- Co-design and test evidence-based interventions in different global contexts
- Development of appropriate metrics and global surveys to temperature check and track progress connected with Lancet Countdown
Changing Worlds Study: Guided Journal

A low-risk, low-cost intervention that provides young people with a personalised way to help them to healthily process and respond to the climate and ecological crises and implement impactful climate action.

The journal simultaneously acts as a novel research tool which will gather rich qualitative data for further research.

In collaboration with Force of Nature are aiming to test the journal with 200 young people across the UK. Some of the young people will also participate in Force of Nature workshops and/or participate in journal reflection workshops.
Workstream 2
Preventative interventions

Experimenting with different self reflection techniques

Daily check in
A chance to practice reflecting on your emotions, to practice gratitude, and to spot trends in emotions.

Journal activities
A wide range of self guided journal activities designed to take between 5-10 minutes to complete.

Freeform writing
A space to express on their own terms, with quotes for inspiration and extra resources.
Workstream 2  
Preventative interventions

### SHORT TERM

**Changing worlds pilot study**
- Test the [guided journal as an intervention and research tool](web: climatecares.co.uk) with young people aged 16-24 in collaboration with Force of Nature
- Add to survey insights and evaluate impact of journal activities

### MEDIUM TERM

**Scaling journal activities**
- Identify applicable sectors and [iterate the journal design](twitter: @climatecares) where self reflection activities would be beneficial, e.g. education sector, support for climate professionals
- Form [ongoing partnerships](web: climatecares.co.uk) with external organisations such as Natural History Museum and Force of Nature to adapt and scale-up journal activities with young people and other relevant groups

### LONG TERM

**Reach new audiences and collate existing interventions**
- Adapt journal for new audiences and [global settings](web: climatecares.co.uk) via existing global collaborations (eg. activists, professionals, indigenous communities)
- Test different [digital formats](web: climatecares.co.uk) (eg. social media campaign, digital app, interactive workshops)
- Collate and evaluate existing interventions, share insights on global dashboard
Policy briefing paper

Paper written in collaboration between Institute of Global Health Innovation and Grantham Institute exploring the impact of climate change on mental health and emotional wellbeing, and the current evidence and implications for policy and practice.

Link to publication

Media coverage:
- David Nabarro blog
- Imperial news story
- British Psychological Society
- Association of Clinical Psychologists UK
- Guardian
- Reuters
- New York Times
- Forbes

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**Workstream 3**

**Policy change**

**SHORT TERM**

Briefing paper development and stakeholder engagement

- Production and launch of **policy white paper**: Impacts of Climate Change on Mental Health
- Development of Climate Cares International **Advisory Board**
- Engagement with **UK and global health and policy experts** to develop recommendations for action
- Analysis of climate change and mental health in **parliamentary discussions**

**MEDIUM TERM**

Stakeholder engagements and briefing paper launch

- Develop network of UK and international policy and health stakeholders
- **Evaluation of current global policy** in mental health and climate change
- Run workshops and webinars to **understand stakeholder needs** and develop appropriate resources, e.g. evidence summaries or training materials
- Develop a **position statement and framework for desired outcomes** with all mental health professional bodies before COP26

**LONG TERM**

**Global policy network**

- Research into **good practice** global health and climate change policy
- **Establish global policy presence** working with our partners in their local contexts, spin off academic articles, support Lancet Global Countdown
- **Development of resources** for policy impact with different stakeholder groups/countries
- **Dissemination** via Climate Cares global network dashboard and webinars/educational series
Our Climate Cares team

Research
- Dr Emma Lawrance: Mental Health Innovations Fellow, Institute of Global Health Innovation
- Rhiannon Thompson: PhD student, NIHR School for Public Health
- Dr Ans Vercammen: Research Fellow, Centre for Environmental Policy
- Dr Vasiliki Kioupi: Assistant Teaching Fellow, Centre for Environmental Policy

Design & PPIE
- Pip Batey: Design Strategist, Helix Centre, Institute of Global Health Innovation
- Emma Slater: Public Engagement Producer, Societal Engagement Team

Policy
- Dr Neil Jennings: Partnership Development Manager, Grantham Institute - Climate Change and the Environment

Communication & Education
- Dr Justine Alford: Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Manager, Institute of Global Health Innovation
- Lily Roberts: Teaching Assistant, NHS Digital Academy, Institute of Global Health Innovation

Interns
- James Diffey: Research and Intervention Design Intern, Institute of Global Health Innovation

Climate & Health
- Dr Ans Vercammen: Research Fellow, Centre for Environmental Policy
- Dr Neil Jennings: Partnership Development Manager, Grantham Institute - Climate Change and the Environment
- Dr Emma Lawrance: Mental Health Innovations Fellow, Institute of Global Health Innovation
- Professor David Nabarro: Co-Director, Institute of Global Health Innovation
- Professor Ara Darzi: Co-Director, Institute of Global Health Innovation
- Gianluca Fontana: Senior Policy Fellow, Institute of Global Health Innovation
- Lenny Naar: Head of Design Strategy Team, Helix Centre, Institute of Global Health Innovation
- Dr Neil Jennings: Partnership Development Manager, Grantham Institute - Climate Change and the Environment
- Dr Vasiliki Kioupi: Assistant Teaching Fellow, Centre for Environmental Policy
- Nicolette Davies: Head of Operations, Institute of Global Health Innovation

Senior advisors
- Dr Neil Jennings: Partnership Development Manager, Grantham Institute - Climate Change and the Environment
- Dr Vasiliki Kioupi: Assistant Teaching Fellow, Centre for Environmental Policy
Climate Cares Advisory Board members

Sarah Niblock
CEO, UK Council for Psychotherapy

Julia Kagunda
Chief Psychologist, Inuka Wellness

Bohdana Dock
Data Evaluation & Insights Manager, The Mix

Katie Hayes
Policy Analyst, Health Canada

Zoe Papadopoulou
Designer (specialising in grief)

Robbie Parks
Post-doc Research Fellow, The Earth Institute

Renzo Guinto
Chief Planetary Doctor, PH Lab

Oliver Harrison
CEO, Alpha Health

Clover Hogan
CEO, Force of Nature

Gary Belkin
Psychiatrist and President of Billion Minds Institute

Alex Evans
Executive Director, Collective Psychology Project

Britt Wray
Author, Broadcaster and Researcher

Ivor Williams
Lead for End-of-Life Care, Institute of Global Health Innovation

Helen Berry
Climate Change and Mental Health Thought Leader
Climate Cares Young Person's Advisory Group

At Climate Cares, we place co-design and PPIE at the centre of all of our projects.

As part of the Changing Worlds study, we formed a Young Person’s Advisory Group to co-design our research and intervention workstream projects with. They are a diverse group of 10 young people with a range of skills and life experience from across the UK.