Climate Change, Shelter and Health

How is climate change affecting health?

Climate change is already challenging people’s health and well-being in many ways, overwhelmingly affecting disadvantaged and marginalised communities and exacerbating existing health inequities. Particular health issues caused or worsened by climate change include:

- conditions (e.g. cardiovascular disease) triggered or exacerbated by extreme heat and heat/humidity events
- respiratory and cardiovascular conditions related to air pollution (including from wildfire smoke)
- spread of vector-borne and water-borne diseases and spread of new diseases, including those transmitted from animals to humans
- illness, injury and death caused by people’s vulnerability to floods, storms and fires
- food insecurity and associated under-nutrition and malnutrition
- clean water availability for drinking and hygiene
- effects on livelihoods, migration and conflict and disruption of health services and access to health services due to extreme weather events

Climate change also impacts mental health and psychosocial well-being:

- continual catastrophic narratives of climate change exacerbate mental distress, particularly among young people, even for individuals who are not directly affected (e.g. ‘eco-anxiety’)
- extreme weather events trigger severe distress
- people who meet criteria for mental illness can be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change on physical as well as mental health

What do we already know about Shelter and Health?

There are clear connections between living conditions and health. The ways that inadequate housing disproportionately impacts the health and well-being of different genders, different ages, and different abilities should be given particular attention.

The design of emergency and recovery sheltering must consider:

- Vector-borne diseases (e.g. malaria). Implications for: window and door screening, action on drainage + standing water in settlements.
- Water-borne diseases (e.g. cholera, diarrhoea). Implications for integration with WASH to improve access to safe and adequate latrines/toilets, ideally at household level. Access to adequate clean water, washing facilities - rainwater harvesting?
- Airborne diseases (e.g. Covid-19) and conditions related to overcrowding and air quality (e.g. pneumonia). Implications for ventilation, cooking space and cooking/heating fuel. Co-benefits of increasing access to clean fuels: reduced greenhouse gas emissions and particulate pollution.
- Extreme temperatures are damaging to health, especially for older and younger people. Implications for building design and materials.

Additionally, there are connections between crises, sheltering and mental health:

- Living conditions during displacement have a comparable impact on people’s mental health and psychosocial well-being as the initial trigger and experience of a crisis.
- HOW shelter programming is designed and implemented can protect the mental health of affected populations.
- There are opportunities to make connections between Shelter and MHPSS actors.
How should Shelter and Settlements actors respond now?

- Adequate housing is a foundational human right. Adequate housing promotes physical and mental health.
- People without access to adequate housing are more vulnerable to climate change and its impacts on health and well-being.
- Shelter and Settlements actors have a role to play in facilitating access to adequate housing, enabling healthier homes and communities.
- Emergency shelter and post-disaster housing needs to be safer AND healthier AND account for expected environmental changes.

- What are the priorities for next steps? How do these relate to the Climate Charter?
- What information, tools and advocacy are needed now?

1. What information/training materials are useful? For what audiences?
   - See example summary documents about shelter and health
   - What specific support, resources, capacity strengthening does the Shelter sector need regarding climate change?

2. What tools / skills / resources are required?
   - Healthier and safer homes and communities require cross-sectoral collaboration, data sharing and practical integration.

   **Multi-sector and integrated working:**
   - How can integration between Shelter and WASH improve health and well-being?
   - How can Shelter and MHPSS actors collaborate to ensure attention is given to the mental health of all people involved in humanitarian crises?

   - To what extent do context analyses include information on endemic health risks as well as climate change risk information? How to include these aspects of the context in programming?

   - How can IEC materials incorporate health as well as safety aspects of housing?


3. What science and advocacy are required? What are the key messages, communication modes, and audiences?

What are the TOP 5 next steps? Who, what, when?