



International Council of Nurses
The global voice of nursing

COP27 November 2022 - How ICN is addressing climate change and planetary health

Geneva, Switzerland; 18 November, 2022 - The International Council of Nurses (ICN) has a [position statement on Nurses, climate change and health](#), which lays out a strong commitment to climate action from the ICN, its member National Nurses Associations and nurses in general. ICN believes that the nursing profession has a duty to contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation, to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and to protecting health and wellbeing, and promoting social justice.

ICN is a member of the [Global Climate and Health Alliance](#) (GCHA), an organisation that seeks to tackle human-induced climate change and to protect and promote public health and it works actively on a variety of different climate projects throughout the year. ICN Nursing and Health Policy Analyst Dr Gill Adynski sits on a GCHA work group which seeks to move the climate and health agenda forward within the World Health Organization and the United Nations.

ICN has also recently signed the [petition calling for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#), which calls for an end to the expansion of fossil fuel use and the management of the global transition away from the use of coal, oil and gas.

Nurses at COP27

A number of nurses attended COP27, which was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 6-18 November. ICN monitored COP27 proceedings online to keep up with decisions that were being made there without having to increase its carbon footprint by having staff members travel to the event.



Dr. Katie Huffling, a member of the ICN Nurse Practitioner/Advanced Practice Network and the Executive Director of the [Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments](#) attended COP27 on behalf of her organisation's efforts to fight climate change. Describing her experiences at COP27, Dr Huffling said:

“It has been vitally important for nurses to be at COP27. It is far too easy for the work of nurses to be unacknowledged. Throughout our history we have been innovators in public health and working with the community to prevent disease, and these are the same skills that are going to be so vital in addressing the climate crisis. And yet, for most of the history of COP, we weren't the ones lifting up this work. During my time here I've been meeting with delegates from around the world and talking with them about the incredible resource they have in the nurses in their home country.”

Dr Connie Sensor, the League of Women Voters' UN Liaison to the United Nations and a member of ICN Member organisation, the American Nurses Association, also attended COP27 to advocate for the voices of nurses and women at COP27. Dr. Sensor stated she would be attending the Health Protest at COP27 later this week and representing the voice of nurses there. She also emphasised the importance of the role of nurses at COP27.



She said being a nurse provided an “opportunity to raise awareness about the impact of climate change on human health and the role that nurses play in innovative solutions. It means being a part of a world movement to empower nurses' and women's leadership at decision-making tables for healthier environments and sustainability of the planet.”

ICN is supportive of climate efforts at COP27 and around the world and encourages its member National Nurses Associations and individual nurses to get involved with climate, environmental and planetary health efforts.

Background: What is COP27 and why is it important to nurses?

[COP27](#) is the UN Climate Change Conference of 2022. This year it was held on the 6th to the 18th of November in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, with climate activists, civil society representatives, heads of state and ministers all attending. The [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) is the secretariat of the UN that works to address the climate crisis facing our planet today. The goal of the UNFCCC is to uphold the 2015 Paris Agreement to keep the global average temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This will allow the stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentration, and give time to allow ecosystems to adapt, which also enables sustainable development. This meeting is focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, building resilience, adapting to the inevitable impacts of climate change, and addressing financing climate action in developing countries.

The effects of climate change are not just something heard about in the far away future, but the impacts are now seen every day. Increased heatwaves, drought, floods and hurricanes are caused by climate change and they are impacting the lives of billions of people (Sachs et al 2022). Nurses have been urged to address climate change through advocacy, education and global citizenship (Rosa et al 2019). Planetary health and human health are inevitably linked. Nurses need to be knowledgeable on the impacts of climate change and encourage health and other sectors to do their parts in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Nurses also need to prepare for the inevitable impacts of climate change through maintaining competencies related to disaster preparedness, the health problems that will be faced by migrating populations, competencies related to asthma, COPD and lung diseases from increased pollution, and increasing mental health issues within populations that experience the impacts of climate change and any other climate related health impacts. Finally, nurses need to advocate for funding from polluting countries to go to middle- and low-income countries to mitigate the effects. Many middle- and low-income countries are likely to see the worst impacts of climate change, despite them not having historically been the biggest polluters. These same countries often face higher burdens of disease than their high-income counterparts. Nurses need to advocate for climate funding to be just and have the biggest polluters fund the efforts to impact climate change.

References

Rosa W, Dossey B, Watson J et al (2019). The United Nations sustainable development goals: the ethic and ethos of holistic nursing. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 37,4, 381-393.

Sachs J, Kroll C, Lafortune G et al (2022). *Sustainable development report 2022*. Cambridge University Press.