



SELF-CARE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

THE BIG PICTURE

Climate change is considered the biggest threat to global health in the 21st century.¹

- Climate change is accelerating the scale, frequency, and intensity of humanitarian emergencies caused by natural disasters such as heatwaves, wildfires, floods, and other severe weather events.
- These severe climate events contribute to widespread illness, injury, and death, while also displacing communities and disrupting access to essential health services and products. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause an additional 250,000 deaths per year.²
- In addition to directly harming human health, the effects of climate change alter the physical environment, leading to increased air pollution, changes in infectious disease patterns, a rise in waterborne illnesses, and growing threats to food safety and security.
- Climate change exacerbates existing health inequities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations and undermining progress towards universal health coverage (UHC).
- Climate change harms sexual and reproductive health (SRH), especially for women and girls, youth, and vulnerable populations living in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Extreme weather events can disrupt access to SRH services and increase the risk of poverty, food insecurity, school dropout, transactional sex, sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections, early marriage, and early childbearing.³
- Disasters and climate change can overwhelm already strained health systems. During emergencies, healthcare providers may struggle to deliver even basic and routine care, which can compromise the continuity and quality of health services.

THE ROLE OF SELF-CARE

Self-care interventions are essential for promoting people's health adaptation and resilience in the face of climate change.

- Individuals and communities are the first responders when a climate disaster strikes, often having no choice but to take matters of health and safety into their own hands.
- When facility-based health service provision is disrupted – including during climate disasters – the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends prioritizing self-care interventions, digital health services, task sharing, and outreach to ensure access to medicines, diagnostics, devices, information, and counseling.⁴

- Self-care actions in the era of climate change will vary depending on context and individual needs. These may include lifestyle adjustments to cope with extreme weather, proactive use of nutritional supplements, self-management of minor health conditions, accessing telehealth services for injury triage or dietary advice, and using self-administered medications and diagnostic tools.
- Empowering individuals to take greater control of their health is a critical step in mitigating the impacts of climate change on health and fostering resilience. When people are equipped with the knowledge and resources to manage aspects of their health, they are better prepared to handle the disruptions, recover more quickly, and maintain continuity of care even in the face of adversity.

THE CALL TO ACTION

Join the Self-Care Trailblazer Group (SCTG) in elevating the health effects of climate change and the role of self-care in strengthening community health, adaptation, and resilience on the road to UHC.

- Raise awareness of the critical link between health, self-care, and climate resilience in global health and climate change policy forums, particularly in discussions on UHC.
- Integrate self-care interventions into countries' emergency preparedness and responses, as well as in national health adaptation plans.
- Leverage the role of private health providers in expanding access to self-care tools, particularly in climate crises, when access to traditional health services may be disrupted.
- Explore the inclusion of self-care interventions in national health benefit packages, such as health insurance schemes, to enhance accessibility and sustainability.
- Mobilize political will and advocate for the inclusion of self-care interventions in climate adaptation funding proposals. Urgently increase the availability of adaptation and resilience finance to ensure governments and organizations prioritize self-care within broader adaptation and resilience strategies.
- Promote the widespread adoption and implementation of the WHO Guideline on Self-Care Interventions for Health and Well-Being, recognizing that no country is immune to the detrimental health impacts of climate change.

DIG DEEPER

Consult these resources to learn more about self-care and climate change.

- [Self-Care in Climate Resilience](#)
- [World Health Organization Climate Change and Health Fact Sheet](#)
- [Climate Change x Sexual and Reproductive Health: Evidence for Action](#)
- [Climate Change, Gender Disparity, and Self-Care](#)
- [The importance of self-care in the context of climate change – blog](#)

REFERENCES

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