

The healthcare sector in the Austrian Panel on Climate Change report

Hanns Moshhammer

Institute of Environmental Health, Center for Public Health, Medical University Vienna



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The Austrian Panel on Climate Change is a national project and its first report is due by the end of this year. The report mirrors the structure of the IPCC reports with the first volume dealing with the science of climate change itself, the second with impacts on climate change (including health) and the third volume discussing measures and actions both regarding mitigation and adaptation. The author of this poster is responsible for coordinating the chapter on the healthcare sector in this volume 3.

“Healthy” healthcare sector?

The Austrian healthcare sector is an influential part of the national economy comprising approx. 10 % of all employees and 6 % of the gross national product. Every relevant economic sector shares the responsibility for national climate change mitigation endeavors. This is even more the case for the healthcare sector since population health also depends on a “healthy”, i.e. sustainable environment. Many mitigation measures in the healthcare sector are not specific to this sector but are of a more general nature. Good examples would be energy savings in hospitals or mobility schemes for patients, employees and consumables. A sustainable healthcare sector would focus more strongly on disease prevention instead of treatment and cure of diseases. This would only be possible after very thorough structural reforms of the whole system.

Health effects of climate change

Climate change affects health through many different pathways (“stressors” like heat, floods, infectious disease vectors, allergenic plants). In preparing and adapting to these stressors the healthcare sector must have access to monitoring data regarding these stressors. The sector usually produces health data. These data must be linked to environmental and meteorological data. To that end they must be prepared in a way to allow meaningful and detailed analyses of the regional and local dose-effect-functions. Only this would enable impact assessments relevant for well planned resource and personnel management, information campaigns and expert training. These issues are discussed in more detail for several climate change related stressors.

Adaptation and mitigation measures of any other sector might also have severe consequences for public health. Health experts therefore should also have a say in the design and planning of these measures. It should be the goal that measures are designed in a way that is beneficial for health or at least that beneficial effects are not outnumbered by adverse effects. In that sense “win-win” measures are preferred over sector-specific adaptation approaches.

Heat-waves

Floods and
land-slides

Vector-borne
diseases

UV-
radiation

Food-borne
diseases

Water-borne
diseases

Storms

Moulds

Novel
allergens

Air
quality

Adverse side-effects
of adaptation and
mitigation measures

Refugees,
migration