



UK Health Alliance
on Climate Change

10 May 2023

Dear First Minister,

We write to you as members of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change to congratulate you on becoming First Minister of Scotland. Our Alliance includes 41 UK-based health organisations representing a collective membership of one million health professionals, many of which live and work in Scotland.

As health leaders, we are deeply concerned about the impact that climate change and biodiversity loss are having on human health, and the subsequent impact this has on our stretched health service. We are already seeing people suffering the consequences of air pollution, poor housing conditions and fuel poverty, and physical and mental illnesses linked to extreme weather including heatwaves and floods. The consequences of climate change pose a systems-wide problem that affects every department of government and requires leadership from the top.

We welcome the vision you have set out in your first speech as First Minister to maximise the opportunity to seize the economic and social opportunities linked with achieving net zero targets and a green economy, with fairness at its heart. Achieving a sustainable health and care service will be central to achieving the wellbeing economy, and seizing the opportunity to invest in transformational change through the covid recovery plans will be critical to ensure resilience for the future.

As you bring forward the Human Rights Bill to incorporate international standards on economic, social, cultural and environmental rights for the people of Scotland, we encourage you to embed the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including the right to clean air, into legislation. The right to clean air is consistent with your commitments to transition to cleaner, renewable energy, invest in greener homes and buildings, and improve access to public transport and active travel. Building the right to clean air into legislation would send a strong message to other nations regarding Scotland's commitment to health and the environment and put in place the legislation for this and future Scottish governments to deliver the actions needed to ensure every person in the country has clean air to breathe.

Limiting global warming and the protection and restoration of nature are both critical for human and planetary health. Human beings need a biodiverse natural world in which to thrive, and the loss of biodiversity and human connection with nature poses significant harm to health. We call on your leadership to ensure the degradation and loss of nature across Scotland is in reverse by 2030 and that Scotland's climate and nature plans are aligned with the science for rapid decarbonisation needed to limit global warming to 1.5C and restore the natural world.

Kind regards,

Dr Richard Smith CBE FMedSci, Chair of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change
Dr Elaine Mulcahy, Director of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change
Professor Andrew Elder, President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh
Professor Rowan Parks, President of The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
Mr Mike McKirdy, President of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow