



2025 CLIMATE AND HEALTH POLICY PRIORITIES FOR UNITED KINGDOM

This document summarises key priority areas of focus for United Kingdom, supported by evidence from the 2025 Global Report of the Lancet Countdown.

ACCELERATE THE CLEAN-ENERGY TRANSITION TO PROTECT HEALTH AND THE ECONOMY

- 1 Accelerating the transition to clean energy, supported by reforms to energy pricing and expanded investment in renewables, will protect health, lower household energy costs, and strengthen the UK economy. Integrating clean transport, active travel, and energy-efficient housing within this transition will deliver additional health and climate benefits.

The UK remains heavily dependent on fossil fuels despite a 17% fall in CO₂ emissions between 2016–2022. While wind and solar are now the cheapest sources of electricity¹, renewable energy remains underutilised, supplying only 5.3% of total energy in 2022 (**Indicator 3.1.1**), while households relied on 62% natural gas and transport on 93% fossil fuels (**Indicator 3.1.2, 3.1.3**).

In 2022, 28,000 deaths were attributable to human-caused PM_{2.5} air pollution, 55% (16,000) of which resulted from fossil-fuel combustion, and 64% (10,000) linked to the use of fossil fuels in road transport (**Indicator 3.2.1**). Continued dependence on fossil fuels and the dominance of gas in setting electricity prices keep energy costs high despite the rapid expansion of cheaper renewables.² Volatile oil and gas markets have deepened fuel poverty, leaving households in cold, damp homes that worsen respiratory and cardiovascular disease, harm mental health, and increase school absences.³

Phasing down fossil fuels and accelerating renewable deployment would reduce air pollution, create jobs, and, if accompanied by energy market reform that better reflects the true cost of generation, help lower energy bills and fuel poverty. Complementary investment in clean transport, active travel, and energy-efficient housing would further reduce pollution exposure and heat stress. As the Chancellor noted, “net zero is the industrial opportunity of the 21st century,” underscoring that a decisive clean-energy transition is essential to protect health, reduce costs, and strengthen the UK economy.⁴

TRANSFORM FOOD SYSTEMS AND DIETS TO IMPROVE HEALTH, CUT EMISSIONS AND IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY

- 2 The UK must transform its food system to improve public health, strengthen food security, and reduce emissions, supporting the country's transition to healthier diets, and net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Poor diets contribute substantially to mortality and morbidity in the UK.⁵ In 2022, almost 29,800 deaths were attributable to excessive consumption of red meat and processed meat while 22,900 deaths were associated with insufficient consumption of nutritious plant-based foods (**Indicator 3.3.2**). The cost of diet-related ill health to the economy is estimated at £268 billion annually.⁶

UK food systems are a significant driver of greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss. The food sector contributes around 30% of the national emissions, largely from red meat and dairy production.^{7,8}

Though per capita emissions from the consumption of red meat and dairy products fell 2.7% from 2021 to 2022, they still accounted for 62% of all agricultural emissions in 2022 (**Indicator 3.3.1**). Moreover, the UK produces just 65% of the food it needs, threatening food security. Only 53% of vegetables and 15% of fruit are home grown, together using just 1% of farmland, with most crops used for livestock feed.^{9,10}

To protect health and the environment, the UK should promote a national transition to plant-rich diets with lower consumption of red meat and dairy. National programmes promoting sustainable, healthy meals in schools, hospitals, and public institutions will be essential, alongside fiscal incentives and advertising regulations that make healthier foods more affordable and accessible. Expanding sustainable horticulture and domestic production of plant-based foods, supported by public procurement standards, local food partnerships, and nutrition education, will ensure that food system transformation translates into healthier diets. These coordinated measures would reduce emissions, lower healthcare costs, and improve food security.

SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE PROTECTED ADAPTATION FUNDING TO PROTECT HEALTH AND ENSURE HEALTH SERVICE RESILIENCE

3 The UK's health system needs sustained, protected adaptation funding to withstand escalating climate risks. Increasing investment in resilient facilities, health workforce training, and community preparedness is essential to maintain essential services and protect lives as floods, droughts, and other extreme events intensify.

Climate change is intensifying extreme weather events and other health hazards across the UK, bringing severe impacts for lives, homes, and infrastructure.¹¹ Between 2012 and 2021, heat-attributable deaths rose 16% compared with 1990–1999 (**Indicator 1.1.5**). Among people aged 65 and over, the economic value of heat-related mortality losses averaged \$4.5 billion per year during 2020–2024, 58% higher than 2000–2004 (**Indicator 4.1.2**). Heat exposure also reduced labour productivity by 5 million hours in 2024 (**Indicator 1.1.3**). Almost 1.75 million people in the UK live less than 1m above sea level (**Indicator 2.3.3**), placing them at risk from rising sea levels and flooding, with health impacts including injury, displacement, and mental health challenges. From 2020–2024, 37% of UK land experienced an average of one month of extreme drought per year (**Indicator 1.2.2**), while tree cover, vital for cooling, air quality, and flood mitigation, fell by 560,000 hectares between 2001–2023 (**Indicator 3.3.2**).

Health facilities, services and staff are particularly exposed, with climate impacts already frequently linked to equipment failures, IT and laboratory disruptions and surgery cancellations.¹² Yet, the current National Adaptation Plan lacks defined goals, timelines, and dedicated funding to strengthen healthcare resilience.¹³

Protected, ring-fenced adaptation funding must support: resilient health facilities, services and staff with reliable energy and water supplies, early warning systems for extreme weather events and health workforce training for climate emergencies. Additionally, investments need to be made into community preparedness, with cooling centres, green infrastructure, and public health campaigns. Strengthening adaptation funding across both health systems and communities will reduce preventable deaths, safeguard essential services, and ensure the UK is prepared for the escalating impacts of climate change.

Accelerating Action

The UK must act urgently to protect health from climate change. Phasing out fossil fuels and scaling up renewable energy will cut air pollution, reduce heat risks, and lower energy costs. Promoting healthier, plant-rich diets and increasing protected adaptation funding will strengthen food security, health services, and community resilience. Together, these actions will save lives, reduce costs, and secure a healthier future for all.

References

1. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/the-seventh-carbon-budget/>
2. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/sites/bartlett/files/the_role_of_natural_gas_in_electricity_prices_in_europe_updated_may_2023.pdf
3. <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fuel-poverty-cold-homes-and-health-inequalities-in-the-uk/read-the-report.pdf>
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-vows-to-go-further-and-faster-to-kickstart-economic-growth>
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey-2019-to-2023/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey-2019-to-2023-report>
6. <https://ffcc.co.uk/publications/the-false-economy-of-big-food>
7. https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/NFS_Evidence-Pack.pdf
8. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Progress-in-reducing-emissions-2025-report-to-Parliament.pdf>
9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farming-evidence-pack-a-high-level-overview-of-the-uk-agricultural-industry/farming-evidence-key-statistics-accessible-version>
10. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/latest-horticulture-statistics/horticulture-statistics-2024>
11. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/progress-in-adapting-to-climate-change-2025/>
12. <https://s41874.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Climate-Resilient-Health-System-Report-1.pdf>
13. <https://obr.uk/box/estimating-current-and-future-adaptation-costs-to-the-uk/>

Contributors

The concept for this brief was developed by the Lancet Countdown and the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change.

This document was written by Elaine Mulcahy, UK Health Alliance on Climate Change; Rachel Evans, British Medical Association; Rose Gallagher, Royal College of Nursing; Shireen Kassam, Plant-Based Health Professionals UK.

Review on behalf of the Lancet Countdown was provided by Mahnoor Saeed, MPP and Elise Digga, MPH.



For more of the latest data on health and climate change, you can find country data sheets by scanning the QR code.