

61st Directing Council

76th Session of the Regional Committee to the WHO for the Americas

Washington DC, 30 September–4 October 2024

Agenda item 4.3 Policy for Strengthening Equity-Oriented Health Sector Action on Climate Change and Health

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the over 28 million nurses worldwide. Climate change poses the greatest threat to global health and development, with the potential to reverse the health gains achieved over the past five decades. As frontline healthcare providers, nurses are pivotal in leading mitigation and adaptation efforts within health sectors, ensuring interventions that are equitable and prevent health inequities.

Nurses witness firsthand the adverse health impacts of climate change, including the spread of infectious diseases, respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, and rising mental health challenges. The nursing profession plays a vital role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable healthcare practices, such as creating care models that reduce unnecessary travel, engaging in climate-informed health initiatives, and strengthening disaster preparedness.

To empower nurses in addressing climate-related health challenges, we must invest in the nursing workforce. This includes targeted education on emerging health issues linked to climate change—such as heat-related illnesses, respiratory diseases, and tropical diseases—as well as education in disaster management and strategic placement in vulnerable areas. Such investments are critical to equipping nurses with the skills and resources needed to deliver high-quality care in communities most affected by climate change.

ICN urges governments to increase funding for a climate-resilient nursing workforce and actively involve nurses in the development of policies and research that address the intersection of health and climate. By prioritizing the nursing profession, we can advance towards a more just and sustainable future, ensuring no one is left behind.