



United Nations Activity Report

The [68th United Nations Civil Society Conference “Building Inclusive and Sustainable Cities and Communities”](#) was held 26-28 August 2019 in Salt Lake City, Utah, United States.

The three-day conference, co-hosted by the United Nations [Department of Global Communications](#), Salt Lake City, and the [NGO Executive Committee](#), featured opening and closing plenary sessions, interactive thematic sessions, NGO-sponsored workshops, exhibits, and a youth hub.

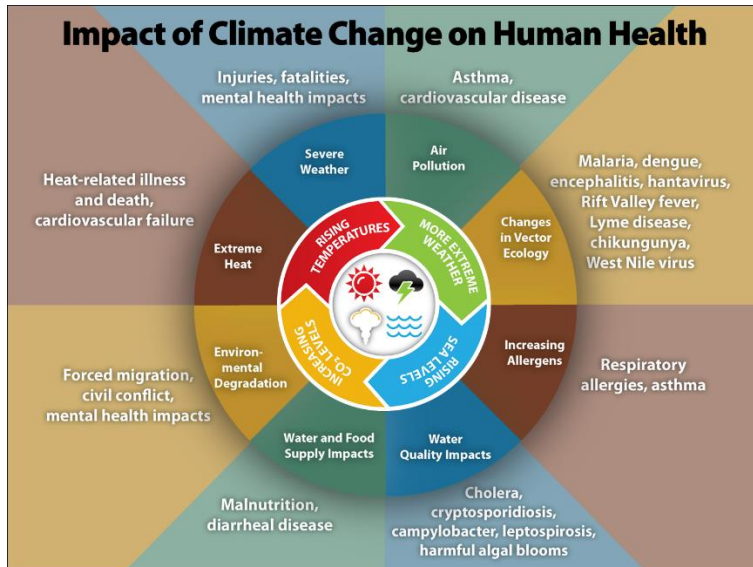
Report Submitted by Aric Shimek, Sigma United Nations Liaison

Climate Crisis or Opportunity? Nursing actions for a healthy future

This session reviewed [Sustainable Development Goal #6](#) (Clean Water and Sanitation), [Sustainable Development Goal #13](#) (Climate Action), [Sustainable Development Goal #14](#) (Life Below Water), and [Sustainable Development Goal #15](#) (Life on Land) as these SDGs relate to ways for nurses to combat climate change.

We know that climate affects health, so nurses must be a part of this conversation. Our health is impacted by the systems around us and where we live. Healthcare is slow to change and continues to use primarily old models. We need to inspire nurses to engage with systems to change the paradigm, and we need to show the public that nurses do many different things and can lead change. We should rethink the normal Western hierarchical structure and challenge how things are structured so that everyone has a chance to influence. Nursing and healthcare have a similar structure to this Western hierarchy with patients often at the bottom of the ladder.

Panel discussion included the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) graphic on “Impact of Climate Change on Human Health” shown here:



As nurses, we know these effects and should be involved in responding to these changes and preparing communities to address them.

Of special discussion was the psychological impact we are seeing in patients of all ages aptly named “eco-anxiety.” These are panic attacks or [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) after surviving a major weather event, and can be especially damaging in children. Suicide rates for farmers is also on the rise related to climate change due to long-term despair and feeling powerless. People are also becoming climate refugees. As nurses, we must learn how to re-frame the climate discussion to be more relatable. People begin to listen more when they understand that their health is in danger (or the health of their kids or families) so it’s incumbent upon nurses to draw the connection for our patients to help them understand the severity of the changes and how their daily decisions can affect this.

Another issue discussed was that of healthcare-generated pollution (“acute care pollution”). On average, healthcare facilities produce 29 lbs. of waste per patient, and healthcare overall accounts for 10% of the greenhouse gases emitted (hospitals alone account for 3% of this).

Nurses can control our own practice, and we have a moral and professional obligation to combat climate change. According to Standard 17 of the Standards of Professional Nursing Practice, “The registered nurse practices in an environmentally safe and healthy manner.” This is our mandate to ACT.

To help nurses act, the [WE ACT-PLEASE Framework](#) was developed to show how nurses and individuals can change their impact on the climate. These are areas where nurses can focus efforts on reducing their impact:

W=Waste

E=Energy and Water (pumping, distributing, and cleaning water is expensive and resource needy)

A = Agriculture and Food – Nurses can drive the change of food systems toward more local, sustainable options

C = Chemicals (Waste anesthesia gas is a major polluter. Of the three most common inhaled agents, one is significantly worse than the other two and is 3,600 times more potent in the atmosphere than CO₂. Patient breathes it in and exhales it out. The gas is immediately released into the atmosphere and becomes a problem.)

T = Transportation

Other resources and ways to get involved:

[Nurses Climate Challenge](#) – A campaign to educate 50,000 health professionals around climate and health by 2022.

[Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments](#)

- US Call to Action on Climate, Health, and Equity: A policy action agenda 2019 (ten priority action areas for political leaders, civil society, and businesses related to climate change)
- Climate conversations – People trust nurses so we can do this every day! Connect with people about something they love and lead into what people know about climate change.
- Nurses are first responders to natural disasters, especially in their own communities. We need to prepare each other for the need to play this role more often because sadly, the changes in the environment are real and probably going to get worse.
- Changes that are good for the planet are also good for an individual's health. A more plant-based diet is good for the planet and good for your body. Being more active and mobile by walking reduces greenhouse gases and also improves personal health.