

Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP
Chair, Environmental Audit Select Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Wednesday 10 June 2020

Dear Mr Dunne,

RE: UK Health Alliance on Climate Change Principles for a Green and Healthy Recovery

The leaders of the G20 recently received a letter sent on behalf of over 40 million doctors, nurses and health professionals asking them to put health at the heart of the global economic recovery. These health professionals, many of whom we represent, have worked tirelessly to protect health from Covid-19. So that the legacy of their hard work and dedication may be continued improvement in public health, we urge you today to do what you can to ensure that the health of people and the environment remains central to the government's recovery plans.

We must not lurch from this health crisis to another, caused by the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. A green and healthy recovery will build resilience in our NHS, reduce health inequalities, and mitigate climate change and its risks to health. In order to realise this vision, the UK's economic recovery package must adhere to the following six principles:

1. Recovery should prioritise the health of people and the planet

Recovery should not sacrifice environmental standards. Instead, every decision should be assessed in relation to its impact on health and climate, as much as on the economy. These assessments should be made public, and measures should aim not just to protect progress that has already been made but to go further in improving health and the environment.

2. Recovery should build a resilient and sustainable economy for the future

Rather than seeking to return to how things were six months ago, any recovery strategy will need to build greater resilience in our economy, and also in our key services, social systems, population health and environment.

3. Recovery should accelerate carbon reduction

An equitable economic recovery, consistent with decarbonisation before 2050 and improving health and wellbeing, is not simply a question of avoiding investment in carbon intensive sectors and businesses. In seeking to kick-start growth, public investment must be targeted on low carbon and carbon reduction industries.

4. Recovery should reduce health inequalities

The Covid-19 outbreak has revealed further underlying inequalities in health outcomes in the UK, and reminds us that crises do not affect everyone equally. As health professionals we have seen those most vulnerable suffer the most. The same is true for the health impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. In leading the recovery from Covid-19, your government should ensure that these inequalities are narrowed, not least to build resilience for future crises.

5. Recovery should follow the science

The recovery should draw on the insights of health and climate scientists, as well as economists. Dialogue between the scientific community and Government has been central to the initial crisis response to Covid-19, and it will be important that the scientific, medical and nursing communities are also involved in shaping the recovery too.

6. Recovery is everyone's responsibility

The impact of Covid-19 has revealed both the need, and our capacity, for collaboration across sectors. Businesses, public services, and communities have all stepped up to find new ways to respond. Our recovery also needs to draw on all of the talent our country has to offer – not least the health professionals who have played such an important role so far. The recovery should be shaped collaboratively, building on the best of what has been seen during the initial crisis.

Covid-19 is a health emergency that has rightly demanded a total response, but in our recovery we must not lock in a future crisis. Without rapid decarbonisation the impact of climate change on our health will be catastrophic; the severe flooding in your constituency this year was a stark reminder of this fact. But we know that the actions the Government could take now to reduce emissions – like accelerating fossil-fuel powered vehicle phaseout, increasing active travel, and building a more sustainable food system – could greatly improve health for people and the planet.

We ask that you hold the Government to account to deliver a healthy recovery, and encourage the incorporation of these principles in its recovery plans. We hope also that you will champion the continued involvement of the health community. We would welcome a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can work with you for a green and healthy recovery

Yours sincerely,



Dr Richard Smith

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Chair, UK Health Alliance of Climate Change

