

Heat is a Health Emergency

COP30 and the case for climate-health action

500,000 deaths per year

Heat is the deadliest consequence of climate change

Heat kills more people than any other climate hazard. An estimated 84% of heatwaves between 2020 and 2024 were caused by climate change. The health burden falls hardest on those least able to protect themselves: outdoor workers, the elderly, pregnant women, children, and people with chronic conditions.

Heat-related deaths among people over 65 have increased by 167% since the 1990s. Heat waves and droughts have contributed to food insecurity for more than 120 million people.

COP30: A Turning Point

At COP30 in Belém, Brazil, governments adopted climate adaptation indicators that include health for the first time as a core monitoring area. This creates accountability: countries will report on heat-related mortality, health system readiness, and protection of vulnerable groups.

60% of countries have completed National Health Adaptation Plans. The remaining 40% need support to integrate health into their climate strategies.

Red Cross Red Crescent Action

Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are responding with community-based solutions:

- Cooling centres near workplaces and health facilities, powered by solar panels
- Community volunteers visiting vulnerable people during heatwaves and distributing information
- First aid training on heat stroke recognition and response
- Early warning systems that trigger anticipatory action before heat peaks

The Ask

For governments: Adopt the COP30 health indicators and integrate heat action into National Health Adaptation Plans.

For donors: Fund community-based heat response, including cooling infrastructure, volunteer networks, and early warning systems.

For National Societies: Build heat response into epidemic preparedness and community health programming.

The climate crisis is a health crisis. Act now.

