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Policy Paper On Climate Change and Health

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1. Introduction

This policy paper aims to outline the reasons why the European Union of General Practitioners/Family Physicians (UEMO) should lend its support to the new Climate Law recently introduced by the European Union (EU 2021. 1119). As an organization representing the interests of general practitioners and family physicians across Europe, UEMO has a crucial role to play in advocating for policies that promote public health and address the urgent challenges posed by climate change.

2. The role of UEMO in contributing to address climate change

UEMO supports the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) policy on climate change and health and makes specific comments concerning family medicine. Action areas where UEMO can contribute to are indicated below:

2.1 Health Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change is a pressing global issue with far-reaching consequences for human health. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation are exacerbating existing health challenges and giving rise to new threats. By supporting the new Climate Law, UEMO can reinforce its commitment to protecting public health and emphasize the importance of addressing climate change as a health priority.

2.2 Promotion of Sustainable Practices

The new Climate Law sets ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to a low-carbon economy. By endorsing this legislation, UEMO can encourage its members and healthcare institutions to adopt sustainable practices. This includes promoting energy-efficient healthcare facilities, implementing waste reduction strategies, and supporting the use of renewable energy sources. In this domain, UEMO can give an input in the health technology assessment process. By

embracing sustainable practices, UEMO and its members can contribute to mitigating climate change while setting an example for other sectors, showing that family medicine is a part of the solution.

2.3 Promoting health equity

Prioritizing health equity in the context of climate change is a fundamental principle for ensuring the well-being of individuals and communities across Europe. Climate change exacerbates health disparities, and it is imperative that UEMO takes a proactive stance in advocating for policies and practices that address these inequities. UEMO recognizes that marginalized populations, including those with limited access to resources and healthcare, are often the most affected by climate-related health risks.

Therefore, UEMO emphasizes the importance of promoting health equity by advocating for equitable access to healthcare services, ensuring that vulnerable communities have the necessary resources and support to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change. This involves collaboration with policymakers, healthcare providers, and community organizations to develop strategies that address the social determinants of health, prioritize preventive care, and promote resilience in the face of climate-related challenges. By championing health equity, UEMO aims to create a sustainable and equitable healthcare system that leaves no one behind in the face of climate change.

2.4 Preventive medicine, especially quaternary prevention

Prevention, a concept within preventive medicine, emphasizes the importance of avoiding unnecessary interventions and reducing potential harm caused by medical overuse. In the context of climate change, quaternary prevention becomes increasingly relevant. By supporting the Climate Law, UEMO can promote quaternary prevention principles within the healthcare sector. Embracing quaternary prevention principles within the context of climate change ensures that healthcare practices

prioritize patient well-being, minimize harm, and contribute to the broader goal of achieving a sustainable and resilient healthcare system. UEMO can also encourage green production of medicines and devices and the education for an adequate prescription.

2.5 Family medicine as a pivotal role in establishing a sustainable healthcare system

Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuous, and coordinated care to individuals and families across their lifespan. This person-centered approach aligns perfectly with the principles of sustainability, as it emphasizes preventive care, early detection, and the management of chronic conditions. By promoting continuity of care and fostering strong doctor-patient relationships, family medicine reduces the need for fragmented and costly interventions, thereby contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare delivery. Moreover, family physicians are uniquely positioned to address the social and environmental determinants of health, as they consider the context of patients' lives and work collaboratively with interdisciplinary teams. Through its emphasis on comprehensive, person-centered care, family medicine offers a solution for achieving a sustainable healthcare system that not only addresses the present needs of patients but also preserves the health and well-being of future generations.

2.6 The physician-patient relationship lies at the heart of a sustainable healthcare system

In an era marked by technological advancements and complex medical interventions, the value of the physician-patient relationship becomes even more significant. As trusted healthcare providers, physicians have a unique opportunity to engage patients in conversations about sustainable healthcare practices. By fostering open and meaningful in-person dialogues, the gold standard face-to-face consultation, physicians can educate patients about the

impacts of their choices on their health and the environment. This person-centered approach not only empowers individuals to make informed decisions but also encourages them to actively participate in the shared responsibility of creating a sustainable future. The physician-patient relationship serves as a catalyst for health education and behavior change, enabling patients to adopt sustainable lifestyles, embrace preventive measures, and collaborate in the co-creation of their healthcare plans. By prioritizing this relationship, healthcare systems can shift from a reactive model of care to one that emphasizes continuity, preventive measures, and the overall well-being of patients. A sustainable healthcare system, built on the foundation of the physician-patient relationship, ensures that care is not only effective and efficient but also responsive to the needs of individuals, communities, and the planet as a whole.

2.7 Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange

The Climate Law emphasizes the importance of international cooperation and knowledge exchange to tackle climate change effectively. UEMO, as a European organization, can leverage its network and partnerships to facilitate collaboration among general practitioners and family physicians across borders. This collaboration can foster the sharing of best practices, research findings, and innovative approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation in healthcare.

2.8 Health Advocacy and public awareness

By endorsing the Climate Law, UEMO can position itself as a strong advocate for the health impacts of climate change within the EU policy landscape. This endorsement can facilitate engagement with policymakers at the national and European levels, enabling UEMO to influence policy decisions that prioritize public health and climate action. UEMO's support can contribute to the development of evidence-based policies and initiatives that protect vulnerable populations and promote a sustainable and resilient healthcare system.

UEMO's support for the Climate Law can also help raise public awareness about the health risks associated with climate change. By leveraging its extensive network of healthcare professionals, UEMO can disseminate information and educational resources to patients and the wider public. This can empower individuals to take action, adopt sustainable lifestyles, and make informed choices that promote both their own health and the health of the planet.

3. Conclusion

Supporting the new Climate Law of the European Union aligns with UEMO's mission to advocate for high-quality healthcare and the well-being of individuals and communities. By endorsing this legislation, UEMO can contribute to mitigating the health impacts of climate change, promoting sustainable practices within the healthcare sector, facilitating collaboration, and advocating for evidence-based policies and health equity. UEMO's support will reinforce the organization's commitment to addressing the urgent climate crisis while safeguarding the health and well-being of the populations it serves.

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