

Health Impacts of Climate Change Lacking in South American Policy Plans

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A new study led by the [Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#), published in *The Lancet Regional Health - Americas*, finds significant gaps in how South American countries are planning for the health effects of climate

change in their policy documents.

The analysis looked at national adaptation plans, nationally determined contributions, and national communications from 12 countries in South America. These plans help countries identify vulnerabilities to climate change impacts and develop adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Researchers examined two aspects of the plans - the inclusion of health in sectors like agriculture, infrastructure, and disaster management; and the addressing of key climate-sensitive health topics like infectious disease, malnutrition, and mental health within health sections.

Across all countries, the plans had thorough information on climate change's health effects but lacked details on implementing adaptation actions. There was minimal discussion of which institutions would lead efforts, funding needs, or measurable indicators -- essential elements of any planning.

“While South American countries acknowledge the health impacts of climate change in their plans, enhancing public health protection requires maximizing climate policy benefits,” said lead author [Dr. Valerie Paz-Soldan](#), associate professor of [tropical medicine and infectious disease](#).

The analysis found some sectors like water resources and agriculture frequently included health concerns but other sectors like energy barely covered health linkages.

Within health sections, infrastructure and disasters were detailed but issues like cardiovascular disease, injuries, and mental health were rarely mentioned. Only Chile included mental health impacts.

“The responsibility for promoting health and wellbeing among populations does not solely rest with the health sector, but also involves other sectors,” Paz-Soldan said.

Experts say countries should utilize assessments of climate-health vulnerabilities to prioritize actions, assign leadership roles, identify funding sources, and create measurable progress indicators.

“While it is our intention that the current analysis is a first comprehensive step, it is also recognized that a more detailed country-level exploration is warranted,” Paz-Soldan said.

The study authors hope the findings can support discussions on improving climate adaptation policies to advance health in South America.

This effort is part of research activities included in the [Lancet Countdown for Climate Change and Health - South America](#). Paz Soldan is the working group leader for the component on adaptation, planning, and resilience. Similar regional teams are working concurrently around the globe.