

Thursday 17 June 2021

Dear Mr Barlow,

RE: Report to Prevent Future Deaths, published Tuesday 20 April 2020

We are writing in response to your Report to Prevent Future Deaths after the tragic death of Ella Adoo Kissi-Debrah.¹ Air quality was deemed a significant contributory factor to her asthma and a cause of her death. Today also happens to be Clean Air Day, a day when many organisations and individuals remind us of our need (indeed, our right²) to breathe clean air.

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (UKHACC) was founded in April 2016, bringing together leading health bodies to advocate for responses to climate change that protect and promote health. Several Alliance members were named in your report.

Your report is a vital reminder of the need for strong action to protect people's health, improving the air we all breathe. Though air pollution can affect us all, it does not do so equally. Evidence has found, for example, that people from more deprived areas and from ethnic minority groups are more likely to experience poor air quality.³ Air quality is highly likely to have played a role in exacerbating inequalities in vulnerability to COVID - as people with health conditions due to air pollution are more at risk of severe COVID complications.⁴

UKHACC fully supports the recommendations that health professionals offer advice to their patients around air quality, and be appropriately trained to do so. With Global Action Plan, UKHACC delivered a pilot project, jointly funded by Defra and the Clean Air Fund, to educate and enable paediatricians and respiratory health professionals to provide better advice to their patients on air pollution. This included developing materials and delivering training online across the UK.⁵ The lessons from this pilot can help to inform future training for health professionals.

Our members' responses highlight the diversity and strength of the actions our members are taking. From reports describing the health impacts of air pollution, to reviewing the training that is delivered to health professionals, to hosting online resources and guidance documents, our members are taking action to support health professionals in appropriately incorporating advice on air quality into the care they provide.

While there is advice that health professionals can give to patients, more research is required to ascertain whether this advice will translate into reduced exposure to air pollution or improved outcomes.⁶ Training and information for health professionals must be situated in the context of wider systemic change that enables air quality to be routinely incorporated into care pathways. This might involve, for example, clear integration of air quality data with A&E information systems so that

¹ Barlow, P., 2021. [Report to prevent future deaths](#)

² UN, 2019. [Issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#)

³ Fecht et al., 2015. [Associations between air pollution and socioeconomic characteristics, ethnicity and age profile of neighbourhoods in England and the Netherlands](#). *Environ Pollut.* 198:201-10

⁴ Travaglio et al., 2021. [Links between air pollution and COVID-19 in England](#). *Environ Pollut.* 268(Pt A):115859

⁵ Global Action Plan. [Healthcare resources](#)

⁶ Whitehouse & Grigg, 2021. [Air pollution and children's health: where next?](#) *BMJ Paediatrics Open*



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clinicians are made aware of air quality as a potential factor in admissions from respiratory or cardiovascular disease. Other technology such as air pollution notifications via apps may help patients to self manage their conditions.

Fully protecting individuals may require clear pathways for referral to housing services, to support individuals at high risk in moving home - though these services would clearly require significant resources to achieve this.

However, we must recognise the limitations of healthcare in addressing this problem and we need urgent action to prevent air pollution from arising in the first place. The recommendation for WHO legal limits is something the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change fully supports, and has been calling for since at least 2018.⁷ While some of our other recommendations have been taken up, such as a ban on the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles, a binding limit for air quality has yet to be incorporated in law. The Environment Bill is a unique opportunity for policy-makers to ensure that this limit becomes a legal requirement which can be used to enforce action. Along with this legal limit, continued investment in active travel and scaling up Clean Air Zones will be vital measures in delivering cleaner air.

Let us make 2021 a turning point where we secure the right to clean air for all.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. King'.

Dr [redacted]
Chair
UK Health Alliance on Climate Change

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Y. Smith'.

Dr [redacted]
Interim Director
UK Health Alliance on Climate Change

⁷ UKHACC, 2018. [Moving Beyond the Air Quality Crisis](#)