

# 2024 CLIMATE AND HEALTH POLICY PRIORITIES FOR JAPAN

This document summarises key priority areas of focus for Japan, supported by evidence from the 2024 Report of the Lancet Countdown.\*

## Accelerating Action



Last year, the first Global Stocktake encouraged parties to enhance health adaptation efforts and create new opportunities to prioritise human survival, health and wellbeing in the 2025 update of national emission reduction targets (NDCs). Japan has historically not been in line with the 1.5°C target and overlooked health outcomes as a priority.<sup>1</sup> This document underscores the urgent need for ambitious climate goals aligned with the 1.5°C target and sufficient emissions reductions within the constraints of the carbon budget<sup>2</sup> to safeguard climate and health.

### PROMOTING ENERGY TRANSITION AND HEALTH CO-BENEFITS

**1** Scale up and promote the adoption of renewable energy to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, enhance energy security, and protect Japan's population from the harmful health impacts of fossil fuels. Ambitious plans in line with 1.5°C will not only mitigate the root cause of climate change, but also result in healthier populations.

Japan must urgently decarbonise the energy sector and move towards renewable sources of energy at an increased rate. The Lancet Countdown found that in 2022, **renewables accounted for only 10.7% of Japan's electricity, while coal usage rose 29% - an 11% increase from 2000 (indicator 3.1.1)**. Furthermore, **Japan allocated a net total of US\$29.1 billion in fossil fuel subsidies in 2022 alone (indicator 4.3.3)**, underscoring its ongoing reliance on fossil fuels.

This continued dependence on fossil fuels has significant health implications: **in 2021, 80,000 deaths were attributable to anthropogenic air pollution (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), with fossil fuels, including coal and liquid gas, contributing to 31% of these deaths (indicator 3.2.1)**.

In transitioning to renewables, Japan has a dual opportunity to lead globally in achieving a net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) economy while supporting healthier populations. Increased use of renewable energy and reduction of GHG emissions, coupled with measures like urban greening and active transportation, can deliver significant co-benefits to health, such as reduced air pollution impacts and healthier lifestyles and wellbeing. To achieve this, Japan must set ambitious NDC targets that prioritize Japan's population's health.

### PROTECTING VULNERABLE GROUPS FROM HEATWAVES

**2** Strengthen heat adaptation measures to protect vulnerable populations, including infants, older adults and workers, and invest in resilient health systems, enforce occupational safety, and expand community-based solutions to mitigate health and economic impacts from escalating risks due to climate change.

The escalating health impacts of climate change on Japan's populations underscore the urgent need for action to protect public health. **From 2014-2023, each infant and adult over 65 was exposed to an average 17.6 and 17 heatwave days per year, respectively. Alarming, in 2023 alone, these vulnerable populations faced a record-breaking 36.2 and 34.9 heatwave days (indicator 1.1.1)**. This dramatic rise in heatwave days highlights the disproportionate risks faced by vulnerable groups, with deadly heatwaves seen as recently as 2018 increasingly threatening lives and straining healthcare systems.

## 2 PROTECTING VULNERABLE GROUPS FROM HEATWAVES (continued)

Heat exposure also significantly affects labor productivity and is increasingly worsening economic output. **In 2023, over 2.23 billion labor hours were lost due to heat, marking a 50% increase from 1990-1999 (indicator 1.1.3). Potential income losses due to heat exposure exceeded \$37.5 billion, with construction workers experiencing 35% of hours lost and 41% of income losses (indicators 1.1.3, 4.1.3).** This economic toll underscores the intersection of climate change, health, and livelihoods.

Japan has initiated policies such as the Climate Change Adaptation Act which includes a heat stroke alert system, cooling centers, and urban greening projects. However, gaps remain in formally addressing climate-resilient health systems, worker safety against heat exposures as well as adaptation measures to protect the most vulnerable populations with emergency medical and social services responses.

To safeguard health and livelihoods, Japan must align its long-term strategies for mitigation with the 1.5°C global goal, while promoting short-term adaptation strategies. These include conducting vulnerability and adaptation assessments, expanding technical and financial support for adaptive measures, and enhancing public mechanisms to monitor progress. Prioritizing equity in funding and community-based solutions will ensure that all populations are protected from worsening heat impacts.

## 3

### INVESTING IN CLIMATE-RESILIENT HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

Invest in and fund climate-resilient health systems, addressing GHG emissions from the health system, building capacity of health professionals to disseminate information on climate change and health, and equipping healthcare facilities to respond to climate-induced disasters.

Japan's NDCs have historically overlooked health outcomes as a priority.<sup>3</sup> Ensuring that future NDCs integrate health considerations will align climate action with the nation's healthcare goals, enabling health care systems to better address challenges exacerbated by climate change such as heat-related illnesses. By incorporating health into climate policies, Japan can create a more comprehensive and effective strategy for protecting the health of its population.

**GHG emissions from Japan's healthcare system have been trending down since 2016, reaching an all-time low in 2021. However, emissions remain high at 75Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e (indicator 3.5).** Decarbonising the health system must also be part of Japan's broader mitigation goals.

Meeting the 1.5°C goal is essential not only to mitigate the worst effects of climate change but also to reduce health burdens on vulnerable populations and alleviate strain on healthcare systems. Equipping healthcare professionals to lead in creating climate-resilient systems—through advanced training, collaborative opportunities, and greater involvement in policy discussions—will amplify their role as trusted voices in climate action. By taking these steps, Japan can position its healthcare sector as a key driver of national resilience to the growing health impacts of climate change.

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