



15 July 2021

FAO The Chair and Clerk of the NI Assembly Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA)

Via email only: Committee.AgriEnvRural@niassembly.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Call for Evidence and Views on the Climate Change Bill

The Royal College of Psychiatrists Northern Ireland (RCPsych NI) welcomes the opportunity to offer our views to help inform the AERA Committee's consideration of the Climate Change Bill and any recommendations it may suggest as the Bill moves to the next stage of the legislative process.

Mental health is one of the many areas where the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss will be felt. Accordingly, the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) has published a [Position Statement](#) declaring that climate change is a global emergency and emphasizing the need for action.

The direct effects of climate change - catastrophic weather events, mass migration, homelessness and food shortages, among other things, will result in trauma, bereavement and loss on a global scale. In turn this is likely to lead to significant increases in mental illness including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and addiction issues. In addition, evidence shows that rising temperature is associated with increased levels of aggression and may also adversely affect rates of suicide. As these problems are felt more locally, our mental health services will face increasing demands. It is also of concern that climate change will affect vulnerable groups in society disproportionately - and this includes those with mental illness.

The RCPsych believes that measures to mitigate the effects of climate change are urgently needed, in order to avoid devastating consequences, not least on mental health. The health sector, as a whole, has a significant carbon footprint

and the RCPsych recognizes that we, along with other health organizations, have a part to play in reduction of carbon emissions.

As well as reducing emissions, we aim to practise in a way that is sustainable in a broader sense. Central to this is an ethos of prevention, recovery, and making wise use of resources. Areas such as social prescribing, promotion of exercise, and utilizing the positive effects of the natural environment are all part of this agenda.

On a positive note, it is increasingly recognized that regular contact with the natural world can lead to improved mental well-being. The RCPsych believes that everyone should have access to nature and green spaces. However, increasing loss of biodiversity puts this at risk and is a further cause of concern.

Clearly climate change is a multi-factorial issue - and the Committee will be presented with detailed evidence across many different spheres. The purpose of this short submission is to emphasize the relevance of mental health.

Consideration must be given to the potentially significant effects on mental health of climate change and biodiversity loss - and we would also suggest that by practising in a more sustainable manner, Psychiatrists can also contribute to a solution.

Many thanks for your consideration of our views.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Wilson', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Richard Wilson, Consultant Psychiatrist
Chair of RCPsych in NI & Vice President RCPsych

Catherine Taggart

Catherine Taggart
Dr Catherine Taggart, Consultant Psychiatrist
Sustainability Lead for RCPsych in NI

PS By way of explaining the context of our views, the Royal College of Psychiatrists is the statutory body responsible for the supervision of the training and accreditation of Psychiatrists in the UK and for providing guidelines and advice regarding the treatment, care and prevention of mental and behavioural disorders. Among our principal aims are to improve the outcomes for those with

mental illness and to improve the mental health of individuals, families and communities. The College has approximately 400 members in Northern Ireland, including Doctors in training. These Doctors provide the backbone of the local Psychiatric Service, offering inpatient, day patient and outpatient treatment, as well as specialist care and consultation across a large range of settings.

References:

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2021) Position Statement [PS03/21](#): Our Planet's Climate and Ecological Emergency

Berry et al, Climate change and mental health: a causal pathways framework, International Journal of Public Health 55, 123-132 (2010)

Monsell et al, What mental health professionals and organizations should do to address climate change, British Journal of Psychiatry Bulletin, 2021

Pichler et al, International comparison of health care carbon footprints, Environmental Research Letters, 14 064004 (2019)