Air pollution – a health issue
Air pollution is a health issue with real health costs. It causes 7 million deaths each year, exerts an economic burden of between billions and trillions of dollars, and is responsible for over one third of deaths from lung cancer, stroke and pulmonary disease.¹

Urban planning – a health issue
Health is an urban planning issue. An estimated 91% of people living in urban areas are exposed to polluted air. The sectors that are the biggest causes of urban air pollution – transport, energy, waste and industry – also contribute to other major health risks, including traffic injuries, noise stressors, barriers to physical activity and sanitation risks. Policies and investments supporting cleaner transport, energy-efficient housing, power generation, industry and better municipal waste management are therefore essential to creating healthy cities.

Bringing health to the policy-making table
The health sector is integral to the policy-making process. Health impacts, costs and benefits are significant and need to be modelled, included and anticipated in generating accurate economic cost–benefit analyses. Health arguments, incentives and linkages could be more effectively used to propel action for clean air and counter climate change. For example in:
• providing better access to relevant evidence on the linkages between air and climate pollutants and health;
• enabling and encouraging health actors to support sector policies that prevent diseases and pollution;
• strengthening the capacity to analyse, evaluate and communicate health co-benefit opportunities from policies and interventions to mitigate air and climate pollutants; and
• helping bridge sectoral decision-making silos, thus enhancing intersectoral cooperation.


Reducing air pollution makes sense health-wise, now and as an investment in a clean and liveable future.
Urban Health Initiative – enabling cities to include health in policy-making

The Urban Health Initiative aims to reduce the deaths and diseases caused by air and climate pollutants and to help cities reap the benefits of policies and measures that tackle air and climate pollution. It aims to equip the health sector with the data, tools and capacity to demonstrate to the public and decision-makers the full range of health and climate benefits that can be achieved from implementing local emission reduction policies and strategies.

The Initiative works with governments and partners to change the trajectory of a city’s health impacts from air pollution, by:

- arming decision-makers with health-based tools to assess the impacts of air pollution and unsustainable urban policies;
- supporting the mapping of health impacts in transport, land-use, energy and housing scenarios;
- helping health and development sectors calculate the health costs and benefits of choices;
- through improving communications, nudging the health sector, urban leaders and the public to rally around healthier development choices.

Healthy cities – key to SDG attainment

Action in cities can drive progress towards multiple SDGs

- Reduce air pollution (SDGs 3.9 and 11.6)
- Combat noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and related risks like obesity (SDG 3.4)
- Access to public transport with special attention to women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons (SDG 11.2)
- Sanitation and waste management (SDGs 3.9 and 11.6)
- Equity (SDG 10)
- Access to safe public and green spaces, particularly for women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons (SDG 11.7)
- Climate action – climate resilience (SDG 13)