

Health professionals are calling for Europe to handle the heat

Mark Wilson and Paul De Raeve respond to reporting on Europe's readiness for extreme heat

Europe's lack of preparedness for extreme heat is not just a climate challenge; it is a growing health risk ("[Why is Europe still not ready for extreme heat?](#)", 3 June).

Healthcare professionals are already seeing the consequences. Heatwaves increase pressure on hospitals, worsen chronic illnesses, and put vulnerable populations at greater risk. At the same time, those caring for patients are increasingly bearing the burden of extreme heat themselves, with consequences for both staff wellbeing and the quality of care.

The [European Federation of Nurses Associations](#) (EFN) has endorsed [Health Care Without Harm](#) Europe's #[HandleTheHeat](#) campaign because nurses across the continent recognise that responding to extreme heat requires more than emergency measures once temperatures soar.

Europe cannot keep reacting to extreme heat after the fact.

[Nearly half of hospitals in European cities are located in urban heat island hotspots](#), exposing facilities to significantly higher temperatures than surrounding areas. The warning signs have been there for years now: In a [survey](#) of more than 1,000 UK healthcare professionals published in 2024, over 90% said heat stress impaired their performance and nearly three-quarters reported that existing protections were inadequate.

We need climate-ready hospitals, stronger protections for healthcare professionals, better early warning systems, and heat-health action plans that prepare health services before the next crisis hits. As the World Health Organization launches the new [Heat-Health Action Plans Guidance](#) and the European Environmental Agency steps up [efforts to strengthen climate resilience](#), the direction of travel is clear: Europe must move beyond risk communication and accelerate implementation across health systems.

Signatures continue to be collected for an [open letter](#) to the European Commission, where health professionals and representative bodies across Europe are calling for concrete action – A comprehensive European Union strategy on climate and health, stronger protections for health professionals and personnel facing heat risks, support for low-carbon, climate-resilient healthcare facilities, and improved preparedness for climate-related health emergencies.

Extreme heat is not an exceptional event and Europe's response to it should stop being exceptional too.

As temperatures continue to rise, protecting patients and those who care for them must become a core part of climate adaptation policy, not an afterthought.

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