



Governing Board Paper: Decision & Discussion items

Title:	Responding to Climate Change as an Organization
Previous papers submitted on this topic:	None
Paper Number:	GB-2020-16
From:	Cochrane Council, with response from the Senior Management Team (signed off by Mark Wilson)
People Involved in the developing the paper:	Erik von Elm (Geo Groups representative on the Council), Maria-Inti Metzendorf (Information Specialists representative on the Council), with approval from the full Council and response from the Senior Management Team
Date:	12 th March 2020. For consideration at the 1 st of April Board meeting.
For your:	Discussion
Access:	Open

Executive summary

This document sets out a proposal prepared by the Cochrane Council on ‘Responding to Climate Change as an Organization’ for the Board’s consideration and an initial response from the Senior Management Team to inform the Board’s discussion.

Issues :

Council’s proposal

Background:

The Council met by teleconference on October 11th, 2019. As an AOB item, Erik von Elm (Geo Group Executive) raised the issue of how Cochrane intends to respond to the challenges of climate change. Erik von Elm and Maria-Inti Metzendorf then drafted this paper, which was discussed by the Council and subsequently revised.

Details:

Cochrane is a global organization with a mission to improve people’s health through evidence-informed decisions. Climate change, caused by the rising emissions of greenhouse gases, such as CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases, represents a threat to ecosystems that are essential to life on the planet. The current global initiatives to strengthen the response to climate change are underpinned by solid evidence from climate science showing that rising global temperatures are due to human production of greenhouse gases, in particular related to fossil fuels used for energy production and transport, but also meat consumption. There is a solid body of evidence that even the most conservative climate goals established by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), an

intergovernmental body of the United Nations, can only be met by a timely and joint response by citizens, governments, and international non-governmental organizations alike. The recently published "[2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change](#)" provides extensive evidence of how climate change impacts human health and health systems.

Cochrane should be a model for an international organization addressing this urgent issue in its own governance. Cochrane should adopt a pro-active stance on how it could best respond to the challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions directly linked to its regular activities. So far, discussions about Cochrane's response to climate change have been informal; related questions have been asked in different fora and in individual conversations. For instance, many members are acutely aware of the environmental impact of their long-distance flights to Cochrane's key events. They struggle with the balance between reducing related CO₂ emissions on one side and participation in these events on the other. A number of immediate measures have been suggested. In addition, various Cochrane groups may have started to think about what they could do at their respective levels. Current suggestions include (but are not restricted to):

- 1) revisiting the schedule of Cochrane's regular meetings including the annual Colloquia and Governance Meetings, which entail long-distance flights for hundreds of delegates;
- 2) considering the choice of Colloquium and Governance Meeting locations with the aim of minimizing travel distance for most delegates;
- 3) promoting regional meetings that may be inter-connected with suitable technology;
- 4) favouring virtual meetings where they can replace in-person meetings e.g. by providing easy access to online videoconferencing technology such as GoToMeeting to groups/members outside the CET; this would also have the dual purpose of making it easier for more people to get involved with Cochrane;
- 5) favouring land-based travelling e.g. by train or coach wherever possible, in particular, with the aim to replace flights of relatively short distances, e.g. within continental Europe and to/from the UK;
- 6) enabling CO₂ offset payments to trusted organizations as an integral component of travel-related expenses covered by Cochrane's funds;
- 7) reducing meat consumption at Cochrane meetings;
- 8) identifying additional opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint related to Cochrane's activities (e.g. running servers on green energy); and
- 9) fostering the production of Cochrane Reviews on interventions to mitigate the effects of climate change on human health.

The Council is aware that some of the above-listed suggestions (or any additional ones) would impact on Cochrane as an organization more than others. Some suggestions may even be perceived as disruptive. To date, there is no coordinated approach within the organization to mitigate climate change, so it is timely that we now seriously consider our options and encourage everyone to join in the conversation and meet an agreed approach.

We therefore suggest convening a standing working group / task force with defined terms of references that (1) reports directly to the Governing Board, (2) is (co-)led by one of its members, and (3) is supported

by the CET. This working group would aim to identify opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint related to Cochrane's activities in a coordinated manner, while carefully considering their impact on the organization. The working group would also support the CET with communicating Cochrane's response to climate change, e.g. with the media.

The Council has a unique role representing Cochrane's various constituencies. It can take on issues that are 'cross-cutting', i.e. affecting all Cochrane groups, and could support the new "Climate change working group" to be convened e.g. if there is need to reach out to the various constituencies. The Council is committed to help shape Cochrane's response to climate change at a time when a new multi-year strategy needs to be established to define Cochrane's priorities beyond 2020.

Decision/Recommendation(s):

For discussion & decision by the Governing Board

Senior Management Team's Response:

Dear Cochrane Council,

Many thanks for the opportunity to comment on this paper. As requested by the Co-Chairs of the Governing Board, our response will be included as a section of this paper, which is due to be presented to the Board for consideration at its next meeting.

Senior Management Team response:

The Senior Management Team recognizes the growing interest of Cochrane members in reducing their own, and the organization's, ecological footprint. This reflects increasing international concern and attention about the impact of human activities on the earth's climate and natural resources.

As stated in the Council's paper, discussions in Cochrane are currently developing organically and based on the enthusiasm of individuals. However, they appear to be coalescing around three main themes:

- Environmental determinants of health; and Cochrane's potential role in producing and advocating for synthesized evidence to inform decision-making in this area
- Environmental impact of healthcare research and interventions; and Cochrane's potential role in developing methodology to inform decision-making in this area
- Reducing the ecological footprint of Cochrane's operations

The Senior Management Team's view is that Cochrane has the potential to prioritize activities in all three areas, but the decision to do so should be based on insight and considered discussion about the costs and benefits to the organization, and their relative priority against Cochrane's other activities to meet its mission. These are important strategic decisions and we therefore propose they are included as part of the Board and Senior Management Team's work to develop the next strategic framework for Cochrane – and in particular, the development of organizational objectives, which will be informed by input from Cochrane Groups.

Further, as possible activities against these three areas are at the exploration stage, should the Board support progressing them, we support the Council's proposal to establish a cross-constituency, cross-

topic taskforce to lead the work. We recommend the group starts by focussing on the data and insight needed to inform decisions on the costs and benefits to the organization of prioritizing these activities.

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Recommendations

The Board is asked to consider the Council's proposals in light of the Senior Management Team's response.

Next steps

The Board should report back to the Council and Senior Management Team on the outcomes of its discussion and any decisions it has taken. The Senior Management Team and Council will then work as required to implement any actions arising.