



## DECLARATION

### Brussels Declaration on air pollution and health

Brussels, 15 November 2018 - We, the undersigned representatives of the International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies, bringing together 59 members from 30 countries, representing 240 million people in the world, and close to 200 million in Europe;

Have adopted the following declaration to European policy makers:

- Taking note that air pollution is the leading environmental risk factor for health<sup>1</sup>;
- Taking note that air pollution is a critical risk factor for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), causing an estimated one-quarter (24%) of all adult deaths from heart disease, 25% from stroke, 43% from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and 29% from lung cancer<sup>2</sup>;
- Taking note of the World Health Organization "Review of evidence on health aspects of air pollution" (REVIHAAP), which concludes that health effects of air pollutants occur at lower concentration levels than previously thought, and highlights that there are new associations with conditions such as diabetes, adverse birth outcomes and impacts on cognitive development<sup>3</sup>;
- Taking note that according to WHO, nine out of ten people breathe air containing high levels of pollutants worldwide, leading to an alarming toll of 7 million early deaths from outdoor and household air pollution<sup>4</sup>;
- Taking note that more than 90% of air-pollution related deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, mainly in Asia and Africa, followed by low- and middle-income countries of the Eastern Mediterranean region, Europe and the Americas, and that many of the world's megacities exceed WHO air quality guidelines by more than 5 times<sup>5</sup>;
- Taking note that in the European Union, air pollution continues to be an "invisible killer" with 400,000 premature deaths; and that the external health-related costs to society from air pollution are estimated to be in the range of €330-940 billion per year<sup>6</sup>;
- Taking note that emission from coal power plants contribute significantly to the burden of disease, with impacts amounting to more than 18,200 premature deaths, about 8,500 new cases of chronic bronchitis, and over 4 million lost working days each year, and that the economic costs of the health impacts from coal combustion in Europe are estimated at up to €42.8 billion per year<sup>7</sup>;

1. [http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)

2. See 2018 World Health Organization figures: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/02-05-2018-9-out-of-10-people-worldwide-breathe-polluted-air-but-more-countries-are-taking-action>

3. [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/193108/REVIHAAP-Final-technical-report-final-version.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/193108/REVIHAAP-Final-technical-report-final-version.pdf?ua=1)

4. See 2018 World Health Organization figures: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/02-05-2018-9-out-of-10-people-worldwide-breathe-polluted-air-but-more-countries-are-taking-action>

5. [http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/02-05-2018-9-out-of-10-people-worldwide-breathe-polluted-air-but-more-countries-are-taking-action](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/02-05-2018-9-out-of-10-people-worldwide-breathe-polluted-air-but-more-countries-are-taking-action)

6. EEA report on air quality in Europe – 2017 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/improving-air-quality-in-european>

7. [https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/unpaid\\_health\\_bill\\_EN.pdf](https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/unpaid_health_bill_EN.pdf)

- Taking note that exposure to nitrogen dioxide, which mainly stems from diesel vehicles, causes an estimated 75 000 till 229 000 premature deaths in the EU annually<sup>8</sup> ;
- Taking note that 22 out of 28 countries in the EU are currently in breach of air quality standards for particulate matter or nitrogen dioxide<sup>9</sup> ;
- Taking note that healthcare mutuals and national health funds, which carry out a mission of public interest, are deeply concerned about people's wellbeing and bear increased health costs from air pollution through covering for additional medication, treatment of disease including hospitalization, sick days etc.; costs which also threaten the sustainability of healthcare systems as a whole ;
- Taking note that air pollution and climate change are intertwined because several air pollutants have a potential impact on climate and global warming in the short term<sup>10</sup>;
- Taking note that air pollution has been associated with increased risk of neurological disorders (stroke, dementia and cognitive disorders)<sup>11</sup> ;

## AIM :

- Calls on national governments and the European Union to adopt comprehensive and strict air quality standards, in line with the health-based recommendations of WHO, or align existing air standards with WHO's, as in the case of the EU<sup>12</sup> ;
- Calls on decision-makers to prioritize and promote those measures that tackle both air pollution and climate change, and protect our health;
- Calls on decision-makers to strengthen efforts to bring down emissions of air pollutants from all sectors, but particularly work to decrease air pollution from transport in cities, coal plants etc. as a major health risk;
- Invites health ministers, health authorities and health representatives to become more engaged in clean air efforts and this in all sectors of society according to the principles of Health in all Policies, as a key way to prevent diseases, to reduce healthcare costs resulting from these diseases and to improve the quality of life of all European citizens.

### About AIM :

The International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies (AIM) is an international umbrella organisation of federations of health mutuals and other not-for-profit healthcare payers. It has 59 members from 30 countries in Europe, Latin America and Africa and the Middle East. 33 of its members, from 20 countries, are based in the European Union. AIM members provide compulsory and/or supplementary health coverage to around 240 million people around the world, including close to 200 million people in Europe, on a not-for-profit basis. Some AIM members also manage health and social services. Collectively, they have a turnover of almost €300 billion.

AIM members are either mutual or health insurance fund. They are: private or public legal entities, solidarity based, not-for-profit oriented organisations whose surpluses are used to benefit the members. Democratically-elected members play a role in the governance of the organization.



8. EEA report on air quality in Europe – 2017, p. 58.

9. See EU Commission background: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/pdf/clean\\_air\\_for\\_all.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/pdf/clean_air_for_all.pdf)

10. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2017>, p. 13

11. Air pollution and brain health: an emerging issue: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laneur/article/PIIS1474-4422\(17\)30462-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laneur/article/PIIS1474-4422(17)30462-3/fulltext); Air pollution, cognitive deficits and brain abnormalities: A pilot study with children and dogs [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223432832\\_Air\\_pollution\\_cognitive\\_deficits\\_and\\_brain\\_abnormalities\\_A\\_pilot\\_study\\_with\\_children\\_and\\_dogs](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223432832_Air_pollution_cognitive_deficits_and_brain_abnormalities_A_pilot_study_with_children_and_dogs).

12. European air quality standards: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/quality/standards.htm>