

## **PS 3.4**

**SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THEIR ROLE IN ADVOCATING TO REDUCE THE  
NEGATIVE HEALTH EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

## | BACKGROUND

Social movements have played a vital role in the history of public health. They have campaigned for the abolishment of slavery, the introduction of votes for women, improved sanitation and water in cities, protection of natural environments, and for reproductive rights to name a few examples. Thus these movements have played a very significant role in improving health conditions over many years, in most countries and globally.

There are numerous social movements around the globe that campaign on the issues of climate and health. Some movements are more focused on protecting the environment for its intrinsic value and other more concerned with actions directly related to health. Protecting the environment and biodiversity as part of combatting climate change is crucial to health because of the increasing evidence that contact with nature and spending time in natural places is good for mental and physical health. Other social movements are centrally concerned with the impact of climate change on health. This sub-theme will consider both types of movements and links between them. Examining the links between health and climate change social movements is vital because people may be more likely to support action for climate change if they understand the health issues global warming will give rise to.

This session will also provide opportunities to learn from the experience of earlier social movements that have led to healthy change. The advocacy for treatment rights for people living with HIV/AIDS is a powerful example of such a movement. The tactics and strategies they used holds lessons for social movements campaigning on climate change and health.

Social movements use many different strategies including political lobbying, public protests, social media activism, boycotts, shareholder activism, petitions, and direct action. Examples of each of these will be highlighted in this session. Most of the tactics are aimed at advocacy for change. The importance of advocacy to public health has been explained as:

Advocacy is necessary to steer public attention away from disease as a personal problem to health as a social issue, and the mass media are an invaluable tool in this process. Advocacy is a strategy for blending science and politics with a social justice value orientation to make the system work better, particularly for those with least resources' (Wallack et al., 1993, p. 5).

## | OBJECTIVES

The session will:

- Examine the role of social movements in advocating for climate action
- What lessons can we bring in from other health social movements?
- Consider the way climate social movements use health arguments in their advocacy
- Examine the strategies used by social movement to determine their effectiveness



Speaker

## Alexis Benos

*Professor of Social Medicine & Primary Health Care*

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
Greece

Dr Alexis Benos is a public health physician, Emeritus Professor in Social Medicine and Primary Health Care at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. His work, combining academic research and teaching with political activism defending health as a social right, is centred in the development of Primary Health Care and Public Health. He is an active member of the International Association of Health Policy (IAHP) and a founding member of People's Health Movement.