



Doctors in Unite  
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## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE 2020 LABOUR LEADERSHIP CONTENDERS

To Rebecca Long-Bailey MP, Keir Starmer MP, Lisa Nandy MP and Emily Thornberry MP,

Doctors in Unite recognises climate change as the single greatest public health emergency faced by the UK. We urge you to do the same as prospective leader of the Labour party.

The World Health Organisation called climate change the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. With COP26 in Glasgow on the horizon, it is crucial that Labour plays a leading role in demonstrating how the UK can take radical steps to minimise its devastating impact.

The landmark 2008 Climate Change Act became law under a Labour government. It was Labour who succeeded in declaring a climate change emergency, making the UK the first nation in the world to do so. These are warm words, but action is vital.

Currently 1.8 million people in the UK live in areas at significant risk of flooding<sup>1</sup>. Over 4.5 million UK children grow up breathing toxic levels of air pollution<sup>2</sup>. Heat related deaths are projected to increase 250% to over 7000 by 2050<sup>3</sup>. Mosquito-borne diseases including West Nile virus have now been highlighted as a potential risk to health by the Committee on Climate Change<sup>4</sup>.

As leader, you should commit a future Labour government to 100% renewable energy for our national grid, and pledge to keep remaining fossil fuels in the ground. Your priority should be massive expansion of our public transport infrastructure, to end our dependence on polluting personal vehicles.

Public Health England should be offered extra funding for their Cold Weather Plan and Heatwave Plan. More support for hospitals and GP surgeries treating patients hit by extreme weather events must be made available.

The UK's responsibility for the global impact of climate change must also be made plain. As one of the first industrialised nations, we should bolster our international development funding, and channel additional resources toward areas of the world disproportionately affected by climate change.

A Labour government managed to create the welfare state out of the ashes of the second world war, when government debt was far higher than it is now. You could make the UK a world leader in green technology and a beacon of hope for other countries to emulate.

You have a choice to act when you become leader. Choose to stand at the front in the fight against climate change, to safeguard the health of everyone the UK.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Jackie Applebee  
Chair, Doctors in Unite

1. <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2018/11/26/the-climate-change-act-10-years-on/>
2. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/clean-air-child-health-air-pollution/>
3. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CCRA-Ch5-People-and-the-built-environment-fact-sheet.pdf>
4. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/tackling-climate-change/preparing-for-climate-change/uk-climate-change-risk-assessment-2017/ccra-chapters/people-and-the-built-environment/>