

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH IN THE DUTCH POLITICAL ARENA

**Dieneke Schram-Bijkerk**, *National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), Bilthoven, the Netherlands*

**Theo van Alphen**, *CQ Consultancy, Leidschendam, the Netherlands*

**Background and aims:** In 2008, a Dutch report about climate change and health concluded that more research was needed in this area. In response, the Netherlands Organization for Health Research and Development (in Dutch: ZonMw) initiated the development of a research proposal. However, until now, a draft proposal has not been supported by the Dutch ministries involved due to a lack of sense of urgency and budget constraints. In order to enhance political support, ZonMw asked RIVM to investigate possibilities to link the proposal to policy needs.

**Methods:** RIVM interviewed policy makers of four Dutch Ministries to investigate existing policy priorities with regard to the four main themes of the draft research proposal; 1) heat stress and air pollution 2) allergies 3) vector-borne diseases and 4) water- and food borne diseases.

**Results:** According to policy makers, it is difficult to assess the urgency for policy making due to the many uncertainties about the extent of climate change related health impacts. Therefore, political attention is minimal. An exception is the so-called 'Delta Program', which is set to prepare the Netherlands for future climate change. A subprogram of the Delta Program considering new buildings and renovation of cities aims to take health effects into account. For example, several strategies to decrease heat stress in cities are under development. However, quite a few climate change mitigation and adaptation measures have been implemented without the evaluation of potential health effects.

**Conclusions:** From a policy perspective, research with regard to the extent of climate change related health impacts is required to give the theme priority and move it higher on the Dutch political agenda. Several ministries recognized that knowledge on health effects is required. It would support the implementation of the Delta Program and the translation of international research findings into (local) Dutch policy-making.