

The Malta Declaration on Climate-Responsive Counselling

Joint Message of Introduction

In recognition of the profound mental health implications of climate change, the International Association for Counselling (IAC), in partnership with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), emphasizes the urgent need for a unified global response from the counselling and psychotherapy profession. Climate change, environmental degradation, and increasing social instability are exacerbating stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, and other mental health challenges worldwide. With climate distress often manifesting as eco-anxiety, displacement, or disaster recovery, mental health responses vary based on individual circumstances, cultural contexts, and environmental realities. Some individuals fear current events, while others grapple with overwhelming uncertainties about the future.

This declaration underscores the evolving role of counselling and psychotherapy associations and, by extension, that of counsellors and psychotherapists, in advocating for urgent climate action, addressing these challenges, fostering resilience, and supporting culturally sensitive, sustainable, and equitable responses to the climate crisis. The IAC and partners acknowledge that while we do not have all the solutions, our collective insights and collaborative efforts with global partners and stakeholders can guide impactful actions.

Sincerely,

- Dr. William Borgen, IAC President
- Lynne Gabriel, BACP President
- Carrie Foster, CCPA President

Key Commitments and Actions

1. Acknowledging the Reality of Climate Change

- The counselling and psychotherapy profession affirms that climate change is a real global threat and attests to its far-reaching impacts on mental health and well-being.

2. Recognizing Global Inequalities

- Climate change disproportionately affects marginalized and vulnerable communities, as well as youth and future generations. Addressing these disparities requires specific, tailored local responses and culturally sensitive approaches that reflect the unique needs and strengths of affected populations.

3. Advancing Advocacy

- The IAC and partners will support counselling and psychotherapy associations/organizations in advocating for urgent climate action by governments, businesses, and organizations.
- Counselling and psychotherapy associations will provide training and materials to enhance the profession's capacity to engage in this advocacy, including ethical guidelines to help guide counsellors and psychotherapists in their advocacy efforts.

4. Fostering Knowledge-Sharing and Collaborative Action

- Global collaboration is essential to address the mental health impacts of climate change. The IAC and partners will facilitate the sharing of resources, research, and effective practices among counselling and psychotherapy associations worldwide, and will promote global and multidisciplinary cooperation in terms of research opportunities and the development of evidence-informed policies and guidelines to support clients.

5. Promoting the Role of Counsellors and Psychotherapists

- Counsellors and psychotherapists possess vital skills to support individuals and communities from a young age and across the life span in managing eco-anxiety and distress, increasing resilience, and fostering adaptive behaviours. Through the application of tailored therapeutic interventions, counsellors and psychotherapists can help with navigating constructive action and emotional well-being.

6. Promoting Holistic Interventions

- Effective climate-responsive counselling and psychotherapy integrates mental health support, ecosystem health, and sustainable development. The IAC and partners will prioritize evidence-informed approaches and practices that acknowledge the interconnectedness of human societies and natural ecosystems, as well as support research that seeks to better understand the specific needs of clients in relation to climate anxiety.

7. Supporting and Educating Therapists

- The mental health and self-care of counsellors and psychotherapists are paramount. The IAC and partners will develop evidence-informed resources (e.g. climate-responsive toolkits) and training to equip therapists with the knowledge and resilience needed to address climate-related challenges effectively.
- Counselling and psychotherapy associations will provide continuing professional development activities (e.g. conferences, roundtable opportunities, peer support groups, virtual events, and other training/networking opportunities) to support counsellors and psychotherapists in this work.

Survey and Collaborative Outcomes

This declaration and its recommendations will be informed by a global survey and consultations with counselling and psychotherapy associations. The survey gathers insights on professional organizations' structures, activities, and challenges, specifically focusing on:

- Descriptive information about professional organizations, including organization names, geographical details, sizes (number of members), and membership demographics.
- Current climate-related initiatives, such as training events, policy statements, awareness-raising activities, ethical guidelines, and available resources.
- Key challenges, including the impact of climate change on counselling standards, advocacy, training needs, and research opportunities.
- Interest in further collaborative research opportunities.

The findings will provide valuable context for ongoing related work, including the development of evidence-informed policies, global guidelines, and climate-responsive toolkits for counsellors and psychotherapists. These insights are instrumental in tailoring counselling practices to address diverse and evolving climate-related mental health needs.

Conclusion

The Malta Declaration on Climate-Responsive Counselling represents a commitment by the global counselling and psychotherapy profession to raise awareness on the devastating impact of climate change on mental health, including its disproportionate effects on youth, marginalized and vulnerable communities, to advocate for urgent climate action, to support mental health in the face of climate change, and to promote equitable, sustainable responses. As counsellors and psychotherapists, we recognize the importance of collaboration, cultural sensitivity, and holistic approaches in addressing this global crisis. By working together and drawing on the collective insights of our global community, we can meaningfully contribute to climate action, climate resilience, mental well-being, and sustainable development.

Submission to United Nations Associations

The **Malta Declaration on Climate-Responsive Counselling** will be submitted to various United Nations Associations for review and consideration, to ensure alignment with global mental health goals.

- World Health Organization (WHO) – Mental Health and Substance Use Division
 - United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
 - World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
 - United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
 - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
 - International Labour Organization
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Signatory and Partner Organizations

The following counselling and psychotherapy associations and organizations have reviewed and agreed to the **Malta Declaration on Climate-Responsive Counselling**. These organizations are committed to upholding the principles set forth in the guidelines and supporting their ongoing implementation and adaptation within their respective regions.

International Associations: (Examples only)

- International Association for Counselling (IAC)
 - American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) (USA)
 - British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
 - Australian Counselling Association (ACA)
 - Malawi Association of Counselling
 - Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA)
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Supporting Organizations and Partners: (Examples only)

- World Federation for Mental Health
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Developed in Collaboration Between the International Association for Counselling (IAC), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA)

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Objective: The objective of the Malta Declaration on Climate-Responsive Counselling is to unify the global counselling and psychotherapy profession in addressing the mental health impacts of climate change through advocacy, culturally sensitive practices, collaboration, and the development of actionable, sustainable solutions.

Contact Information: For inquiries or feedback, please contact:

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 - Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) www.ccpa-accp.ca
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