PRESS RELEASE

First meeting of the regional expert group of ISMED-CLIM, a European project for the protection of vulnerable groups from the effects of climate change in the Mediterranean region

- **ISMED-CLIM is a European project coordinated by the University of Cyprus and has 27 partners from 11 countries, including the Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili and the Vall d'Hebron Research Institute, which lead the regional working group**

- **The REFIT BCN research group and the Barcelona Aging and Longevity Lab (BALL) organized a participatory dynamic at the Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili with 20 professionals who are experts in climate change and health to launch the regional task force in Barcelona that will monitor the results derived from the project**

Barcelona, X July 2025. – The task force is made up of a group of specialists from the fields of health, climate, administration, health and environmental research, and representatives of the citizenship. The group met at the Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili last June to participate in a workshop that served as a starting point for the regional ISMED-CLIM working group in Barcelona, led by the REFiT BCN research group of the Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili and the Vall d'Hebron Research Institute (VHIR). Other expert groups have met in the cities of León (Spain), Nicosia (Cyprus), Rome (Italy), Lisbon (Portugal) and Athens (Greece).

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The european project ISMED-CLIM, funded by EU Horizon Mission Climate Change funds, aims to improve the understanding of the **effects of climate change on health in the Mediterranean region and co-create effective solutions for the protection of vulnerable groups and the resilience of health systems**. The Mediterranean region is warming 20% faster than the global average. In addition, weather conditions have caused more frequent fires, have increased high-intensity precipitation and more heat waves to occur. Coordinated by the University of Cyprus, ISMED-CLIM has 27 partners from 11 countries.

The project will study the effects of climate change on vulnerable groups such as outdoor workers, pregnant women and elderly people with hypertension. The latter group will be studied in Barcelona.

Old people with hypertension are at higher risk during periods of extreme heat or air pollution, as rising temperatures can cause dehydration, cardiovascular stress or worsen hypertension with a higher risk of hospitalization and even death. The regional project led by the Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili and the Vall d'Hebron Research Institute will seek to develop and test practical solutions to reduce these risks.

16 reference entities lay the foundations of the regional project

The objective of the participatory dynamic that served as the starting point for the project was to define the existing knowledge base on climate change and health and what the needs of the population are in relation to protection and resilience to climate change. The REFIT Bcn research group, from the Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili and the VHIR, with the collaboration of BALL, organized a workshop aimed at collectively sharing different local knowledge and experiences in relation to the topic through semi-structured conversations in small groups, following the *World Café* methodology.

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Three areas were defined and discussed: knowledge and practice; needs, barriers and enabling factors; and tools. Within this framework, current policies were assessed or opportunities such as neighborhood community networks were detected. The most vulnerable subgroups within the elderly population were also identified, such as people over 75 with comorbidities. Finally, the role of climate shelters, technology or primary and community care was analyzed.

The participatory dynamic included professionals and experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency of Catalonia, the Public Health Agency of Barcelona, the Medical Emergency System, the Barcelona Health Consortium, the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), the University of Barcelona (UB), the Open University of Catalonia (UOC), the EAP Turó-Vilapicina, the EAP Larrard, the CAP Barceloneta, the Meteorological Service of Catalonia, the Federation of Senior Citizens' Associations of Catalonia and the Health and Community Foundation, together with experts from the VHIR and the Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili.

Real laboratory to test the different tools

In the next steps of the project, a randomized controlled trial will be carried out with more than 100 people (50 in Barcelona and 50 in Cyprus) to evaluate the effectiveness of personalized alerts via phones in the event of extreme heat or decline in air quality; personalized recommendations to mitigate exposure including advice on ventilation or suggestions to adapt activity; and the use of wearable sensors to monitor environmental exposure and key health indicators such as heart rate or blood pressure.

The results will contribute to the **development of practical and scalable tools that can reduce the impacts of climate change on the health of vulnerable populations**, one of the main objectives of ISMED-CLIM. In addition, the information collected will serve to train health professionals and to support public health organizations working on climate adaptation strategies.

Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili, a referent in Intermediate and Primary Care

Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili is a public company of the Generalitat de Catalunya, attached to the Catalan Health Service, which manages intermediate care and primary care services in the city of Barcelona.

In addition to being one of the city's main public healthcare providers, Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili is a leading entity in terms of teaching, research and innovation, which are strongly linked to healthcare activity, both in intermediate care and primary care, and which have a multidisciplinary approach.

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