



Health bodies warn that heatwaves put health at risk

Media release – 14 January 2013

Leading medical organisation the Australian Medical Association (AMA) has joined with the Climate and Health Alliance and the Climate Commission to issue a health alert in response to recent heatwaves.

Heat is the silent killer. Most Australians do not realise that heat is the leading cause of weather-related death. The three organisations are urging people to take care of themselves in these conditions, to be aware of the dangers of extreme heat, and encourage people to follow health and medical advice about how to stay cool as Australia enters another scorching heatwave.

AMA President, Dr Steve Hambleton, said today that climate change and its effects are hitting Australia in a dramatic and devastating way this summer.

“Extreme weather events like the heatwaves and devastating fires being experienced across Australia will unfortunately become more frequent,” Dr Hambleton said.

“It is crucial that we plan ahead to minimise their adverse health effects.

“At a policy level, we need a comprehensive and coordinated national strategy for climate change and health that includes local disaster management plans and active communication links between hospitals, major medical centres, local weather forecasters, and emergency response agencies.”

Climate and Health Alliance President, Dr Liz Hanna, said there is no doubt that the heatwaves are posing serious risks to health, particularly among people who are unable to modify their exposure to the elements.

“Heat kills more Australians than the road toll each year,” Dr Hanna said.

“Everyone working or playing outdoors is at risk of overheating on these very hot days. Heat can also worsen existing illnesses. People with heart conditions, in particular, should take care to keep cool and not exert themselves.

“Those caring for vulnerable people and small children should be aware of their higher risks of dehydration and heat stroke. Health care providers should also be prepared for increased demand on their services and resources,” Dr Hanna said.

The Climate Commission released a new resource on heatwaves this week [Off the Charts: Extreme Australian Summer Heat](#) highlighting the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to put measures in place to prepare for more extreme weather.

Climate Commissioner, Roger Beale, said that it is important that people are alerted to the risks that climate change poses so that, as a community, we can take appropriate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and respond to extreme weather.

“Although Australia has always had heatwaves, hot days and bushfires, climate change is increasing the risk of more frequent and longer heatwaves and more extreme hot days, as well as exacerbating bushfire conditions.

“The length, extent and severity of the current Australian heatwave is unprecedented in the measurement record,” Mr Beale said.

Media contacts:

Climate Commissioner Roger Beale, contact Amanda McKenzie 0409 535 437

AMA President Steve Hambleton, contact John Flannery 0419 494 761

CAHA President Liz Hanna 02 6125 5626