

# Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA)

**MEDIA RELEASE (for immediate release)**

**4<sup>th</sup> August 2010**

## **A new prescription needed for a safe climate**

Health leaders meeting in Melbourne today diagnosed urgent action on climate change as needed to safeguard the community's health.

The meeting over 40 health sector leaders from across Australia has prompted the formation of the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) to advocate for urgent policy action on climate change to reduce the very significant threats posed to human health.

Internationally respected medical journal *The Lancet* said last year: "Climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

Communities in Australia are already experiencing the physical and mental health effects from an increase in bushfires, heatwaves, severe storms, and drought. All of these events are expected to occur with increasing frequency and severity with rapid climate change.

Spokesperson for the Climate and Health Alliance, Fiona Armstrong, said the alliance was calling for urgent emissions reductions to protect health.

"As we approach the federal election, CAHA calls on all our political leaders to plan and deliver effective policy to reduce emissions to protect the health of the community now and in the future," Ms Armstrong said.

"Scientists are warning us we may have only this decade to act to avoid catastrophic runaway climate change. We urge our governments to act on this advice. As health professionals we value science and its inclusion in the development of public policy and we expect our governments to do the same."

Fiona Armstrong said CAHA took the view that if governments were not prepared to take a leadership role, then civil society must respond.

"Many politicians appear to believe that it is possible to delay action on climate change. The reality is that governments have now been procrastinating for decades. Time is running out. Our emissions to date mean we already face a 2°C global average temperature rise even if we reduce emissions to zero very quickly. This is not something we can bury our heads in the sand about as a community any longer. Even the 0.8°C rise we have had already is adversely impacting on natural ecosystems and further rises will bring a wave of extinctions, and may well lead to irreversible tipping points in the decline of major earth systems. Action to dramatically reduce emissions is needed now."

There are strong economic, environmental, social and health and benefits for countries who took the lead in lowering emissions, Ms Armstrong said.

"Early action now will boost our international competitiveness, improve our energy security and help develop healthier and more connected communities. There are also many health gains possible from climate action. Cutting pollution from burning fossil fuels has important climate *and* health benefits, and shifting to active and public transport can help reduce chronic health problems such as obesity, osteoporosis, heart disease and diabetes."

Details regarding Climate and Health Alliance priorities are available on request. **For more information contact: Fiona Armstrong on 0438900005.**