



CLIMATE^{AND}
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

2013 Federal Election Policy Priorities

Climate and Health Alliance

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is an alliance of health sector organisations working together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions. Members include organisations representing doctors, nurses, midwives, public health and health promotion professionals, psychologists, social workers, physiotherapists, medical students, as well as health care service providers, institutions, academics, researchers and consumers.

Overview

Climate change poses significant immediate and long-term direct and indirect risks to the health of the Australian and international community. Children, elderly people and those with existing chronic illnesses are particularly at risk from direct effects. Human society more broadly is threatened by the longer term indirect effects on water, food security and ecosystem supports.

Protecting the health of the population through ensuring viable and ecologically sustainable socio-economic wellbeing should be a priority for all governments. Reducing the risk of climate change through reduction in greenhouse gas emissions at the rate advised by climate scientists is a core strategy for health protection and promotion. Central to this is the assessment and evaluation of the risks for all segments of the population, and the implementation of plans to reduce risks and prepare for climate impacts.

Policy Priorities

- 1. Emissions Reductions Strategies to Protect and Promote Health**
- 2. National Plan for Climate, Health and Wellbeing**

1. Emissions Reductions Strategies to Protect and Promote Health

Avoiding serious health effects from climate change requires the implementation of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The development of policy to reduce emissions across all sectors should be take into account the associated risks and benefits for health and well-being.

Current bipartisan national emission reduction targets do not reflect the global carbon budget of around 500 gigatons if we are to limit warming to less than the internationally agreed target of 2

degrees. Current per capita emissions would mean Australians use four times as much of the carbon budget as the average global citizen. Revised targets must reflect our ethical responsibilities to current and future generations to assume a fair share of the global carbon budget.

Australian political leaders and international negotiators should advocate loudly and clearly to other world leaders (including other wealthy high per-capita polluting countries like the USA and Canada) to commit to emissions reduction targets that will protect our children and future generations from dangerous climate change.

This includes the **establishment of stronger emissions reduction targets for 2020** to prevent growth in atmospheric carbon stocks as well as for 2050 and 2070 to ensure emissions continue to decline after 2020.

The **maintenance and strengthening of a national price on carbon** is important both as an international signal of Australia's commitment to cutting emissions as well as to assist businesses and industries operating in Australia to transition to low carbon operation and maintain their international competitiveness.

CAHA supports the retention and **expansion of the carbon price mechanism** to cover more industries (such as transport) and a wider scope of greenhouse gas emissions (such as aviation and maritime emissions).

The development of **additional measures to promote clean healthy safe renewable energy** are needed, such as the expansion of the renewable energy target to 60% by 2020, the provision of loan guarantees for financing renewable energy projects, the promotion of green energy options for consumers, and consistent, fair feed in tariffs for electricity consumers investing in energy generation technologies.

Policy development in all sectors requires the application of a **'climate and health lens'** i.e. it should consider both climate and health implications.

In particular, policy decisions around energy and transport policy should consider the health benefits from emissions reductions in these sectors, such as **reducing air pollution associated with fossil fuel combustion for electricity and transport**, and preventing the **health and social harms associated with coal and unconventional gas mining**.

A **national plan to guide Australia's transition away from fossil fuels to a low carbon economy** is needed. This must include the **scaling back of coal exports**, and in the longer term, for a complete cessation of coal production for export if its intended use is combustion. It should also include strategies to ensure **a just transition** for those working in the fossil fuel sector and training and **development of the workforce required in low carbon industries and sectors**.

The development of **specific initiatives to incentivise emissions reductions and renewable energy deployment in each sector** is needed. In the health sector this should include: incentives to reduce emissions in health and medical supply chains; reduce emissions and risks to health by incentivising the adoption of clean renewable energy generation by both public and private

healthcare providers; incentives to save water; reduce waste; and minimise environmental harm and risk to health through reducing chemical use and encouraging safe disposal.

Additionally the **removal of perverse incentives to produce greenhouse gas emissions** is vital, therefore CAHA support the removal of federal fossil fuel subsidies and for the \$10 billion that is currently allocated to fossil fuel subsidies annually be redirected to clean renewable energy deployment.

The Climate and Health Alliance urges all political parties to support the following measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to protect health from climate change and the direct risks to health associated with our fossil fuel intensive national economy:

- Minimum **national emissions reduction targets of 50% of 1990 levels by 2020** and 80% by 2050¹
- Maintain and **strengthen the carbon price legislation** to include a larger number of industries (e.g. transport) and broader scope of greenhouse gas emissions
- **Extend the renewable energy target** to 60% by 2020
- Strongly **encourage the rest of the world's leaders** (including other wealthy high per-capita polluting countries like the USA and Canada) **to commit to emission reduction targets** to limit global future emissions to 500Gt to keep warming under two degrees
- Develop **adaptation plans** that reflect currently predicted impacts to ensure that we are adequately prepared to protect our children and future generations from climate change.
- Federal policies should encourage **government departments and agencies to reduce their carbon footprint** (e.g., by increasing energy efficiency, switching to renewable energy, reducing waste, reducing personal transport emissions, purchasing carbon offsets for gas use and air travel, and monitoring the carbon footprint of suppliers)
- Develop **criteria and mechanisms for mandatory reporting** for all federal government departments on their transition to low carbon operations
- All policy and legislation should have **incorporate a principle acknowledging the need to address global warming** and have a statement about how this policy or legislation will help to achieve this
- Considerations regarding the need to prevent dangerous climate change need to be incorporated into all aspects of government decision making
- Federal policies should seek **to ensure that government financial investments are not contributing to climate change**
 - Develop and implement a range of measure to promote renewable energy such as:
 - Removal of fossil fuel subsidies and redirect funds to clean renewable energy deployment
 - Providing loan guarantees for financing clean renewable energy projects
 - Creating incentives for electricity retailers to promote and sell green energy options
 - Creating nationally consistent feed in tariff for distributed generation e.g. domestic solar and wind

¹ *See den Elzen, M. et al. Analysing the greenhouse gas emissions reductions of the mitigation action plans by non Annexe 1 countries by 2020, *Energy Policy*, 2013, 56, pp.633-643).

- Strengthen **national standards for air quality** and increase penalties with non-compliance associated with monitoring and reporting
- Impose a **national moratorium on unconventional gas** exploration until the health, social, net economic, environmental and climate impacts are fully evaluated
- Develop **sector specific incentives to encourage emissions reductions in all sectors**, including health
- Programs to **increase public awareness** of the rationale for the programs to transition from a fossil fuel to a renewable driven economy and the processes involved in that transition

2. National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing

Climate change already contributes serious immediate threats to the health of Australians. However these threats will substantially increase the longer effective action consistent with the peer reviewed climate science is delayed. Addressing these current and future threats requires the development of a national strategy to outline Australia's response to the health risks from climate change and the carbon intensive national economy.

A coordinated **National Strategy on Climate, Health and Wellbeing** should identify key risks, develop responses commensurate with the risks, and establish initiatives to reduce the risks to health, with the overall aim of protecting and promoting health and well-being for all people.

This should include the **development of strategies to improve the preparedness and ability of the healthcare sector to respond** to climate threats to health, including from extreme weather events.

There is currently no responsible agency at the federal level to respond to climate and environmental threats to health. A **national agency is needed to oversee policy** that ensures the implications for climate and health are considered across all sectors.

The **establishment or nomination of an agency** to evaluate risks to health and wellbeing from climate change as well as other environmental health risks and to drive policy and research in this area should be a core element of the national plan.

Part of the national strategy on climate and health should be the **establishment of a sustainable healthcare unit** within the federal Department of Health and Ageing to drive initiatives for low carbon healthcare. A key initiative would be a national education campaign to ensure all members of the community are well informed about the risks to health and well-being from climate change as well as the benefits and opportunities afforded by low carbon lifestyles and industries.

The Climate and Health Alliance urges all political parties to support the development of a **National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing** with the following key features:

1. The nomination or establishment of a National Agency with responsibility for developing and coordinating policy and research consistent with the National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing. This agency (similar to or incorporated within a **National Centre for Disease**

Control and Prevention) would evaluate, monitor and report on health risks to Australians and recommend policy responses, including from climate change and fossil fuel use.

This should be an independent agency funded by federal and state governments. Its functions would include:

- the development and monitoring of **health impact assessment** processes to evaluate the health impacts of policies, plans and projects across sectors, in particular in relation to energy and transport infrastructure projects
- establishment of processes for **surveillance and monitoring of health risks** associated with climate change and the carbon intensive economy, both at the population level and for vulnerable / high risk groups;
- take responsibility for **leadership in health risk mitigation** and disease prevention programs;
- contribute to **community education on climate change and health**; and
- participate in developing risk profiles for communities in Australia and **the region** (Pacific, South-east Asia, PNG).

This national agency should have **broad responsibilities related to environmental health**, including research into the connections between environment / ecology / nature and health, monitoring of identified problems and the capacity to report / advise/ recommend actions to government, as well as a duty to report annually.

The National Agency with responsibilities for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should **liaise closely with other health agencies**, including the federal, state and territory health departments, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the Australian Commission for Quality and Safety in Health Care (ACQSHC), and the National Preventive Health Agency (NPHA), as well as interacting with research centres with climate and environmental health expertise and international agencies and authorities.

The National Agency for Climate, Health and Wellbeing would require access to datasets on climate and environmental health impacts with environmental parameters as well as a workforce with considerable expertise in the investigation, coordination and management of health risk factors, including those exacerbated by climate change and other environmental risks.

The National Agency for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should have sufficient funding to **support research**. This should include, as a priority, an evaluation of the economic costs to health budgets associated with health impacts from climate change as well as a comprehensive assessment of the economics of the health co-benefits associated with transforming to a low carbon economy.

The National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should include the **establishment of a sustainable healthcare unit** within federal health department similar to the UK Commission for Sustainable Health Care to drive emissions reductions and promote environmental sustainability initiatives in the health sector.

2. A core role of the National Agency for Climate, Health and Wellbeing would be in **research translation and public education**. A key task would be the development and implementation of a national education campaign on climate, health and wellbeing.

The Climate and Health Alliance recognises that most Australians understand that human induced climate change is occurring and that it has immediate as well as long term implications for health and wellbeing. However, there is also much misinformation and confusion about the necessity as well as the scale and urgency of the transition to low carbon pathways.

This should be addressed by:

- The development of **a national educational campaign** to inform the community about the risks posed to health and wellbeing by climate change and the health benefits associated with cutting emissions.
 - This should include **strategies to engage all sections of the community**, including those who may be hard to reach, with education campaigns e.g. low income and disadvantaged people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, children and young people.
3. The development of the National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should include the **evaluation of risks to health from climate change to particular population groups** i.e. children, elderly people, those living in rural and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those with chronic illnesses (e.g. cardiovascular disease, respiratory illnesses, kidney disease, multiple sclerosis, psychiatric disorders).
 4. The National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should be developed and implemented by the **Council of Australian Governments** to ensure the coordination of activities with the states and territories. A mechanism for consultation and collaboration with local government will also be required.
 5. The National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should establish a mechanism for **health and medical and civil society groups to be represented and consulted** at the COAG committee level in the same way that business groups are engaged in the COAG agenda.
 6. A National Agency for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should have responsibility for monitoring and review of action on developing and implementing the policy level commitments to address global warming. It should also **engage across portfolios** to ensure interface with policy measures in other sectors. This will require a mechanism to ensure the implications for health are considered in the development of policy to respond to climate change and in reducing the carbon intensity of the Australian economy. The development of integrated policy to reduce emissions can simultaneously improve health if strategies are carefully targeted.
 7. Core tasks in the development of the National Plan for Climate and Health and Wellbeing include a strategy to **engage the health sector and health professionals** to develop a high

level of 'climate literacy' to support the development of evidence based responses and enhance the preparedness of the sector to respond to climate risks.

8. The National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should include the development of criteria and mechanisms for **mandatory reporting for all federal government departments** on their transition to low carbon operations, including federally funded health initiatives such as Medicare Locals and GPs. The Strategy should establish regulations for mandatory sustainability accreditation standards for all health care facilities.
9. The development of the National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing should include the **establishment of an expert climate and health reference group** to provide advice on science and policy to ensure strategies developed are based on the best available evidence.

Climate and Health Alliance Members

Public Health Association of Australia, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Australian Psychological Society, Australian Women's Health Network, Australian Medical Students Association, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Australian Nursing Federation, Australian Association of Social Workers, Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association, Australian Rural Health Education Network, Australian Council of Social Service, Australian Health Promotion Association, Australian Institute of Health Innovation, CRANAplus, Doctors Reform Society, Health Issues Centre, Australian College of Nursing, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of NSW, Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health, North Yarra Community Health, Women's Health East, Women's Health in the North, and World Vision Australia

