

Forum on Climate and Health: Research, Policy and Advocacy

Joint Statement from Participants 15 November 2013

Health and medical researchers, health and medical professionals, students, environmental educators and community members attending the Climate and Health Forum in Melbourne on 6th November 2013 have issued a joint statement expressing their collective concern at the current lack of recognition of the health effects of climate change by governments, businesses and the broader community.

The Participants (undersigned) said in the Statement:

“Climate change is the greatest health risk of the 21st century.

There is a clear relationship between human-driven climate change and extreme weather events, including an increase in the frequency and severity of heatwaves, floods, and bushfires.

The health of people in Australia, in the Asia Pacific region, and around the world is being affected by increasingly frequent and more extreme weather events. Climate change has national and global significance as an issue of public health and safety, and has the potential to cause significant loss of life.

The recent bushfires in NSW and extremely high average temperatures are local indicators of the rapid increase in global temperatures being driven by the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas; deforestation; and carbon intensive agriculture.

The use of fossil fuels such as coal and gas not only drives climate change, but causes harm to the health of people now, and is occurring at the expense of healthy and secure societies in coming years and decades.

We urge individuals, organisations, communities, businesses and governments to shift investment away from polluting industries to protect the health and wellbeing of current and future generations.

A healthy community is the foundation of a healthy economy, and human health and wellbeing is fundamentally dependent on healthy ecosystems.

Consideration of the interdependence of health and environment needs to be factored into trade and investment decisions about energy and transport and should guide private and public divestment from fossil fuel industries.

The current and increasingly severe impacts on human health from climate change are not being adequately recognised in public and private sector decisions, or in the national health and medical research agenda. The National Health and Medical Research Council spends less than a quarter of one percent of all its research funding on projects with any connection to climate change.

We urge governments and policymakers to use the expertise of public health professionals and academics as a rigorously researched basis for public policy on health and environment, and support practical community-based projects that translate the benefits of climate science into real gains for communities. This should include research into cognitive psychological barriers to responding to climate

change and programs to build resilience among individuals, families and communities to deal with the psychological, mental, social and physical challenges posed by climate change.

We ask the Australian government to fund a program of research that will support the Australian community to plan for and manage the health effects of climate change and extreme weather, and deliver benefits for the many Australian and regional communities affected by climate events, such as bushfires and drought, flooding and storms, and coastal inundation.

We urge the federal and state parliaments to consider the health impacts of climate change and ask all levels of government and parties to work together to develop a national strategy to respond.”

Signed

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