

16 DECEMBER 2019

MEDIA RELEASE

Leading health and medical groups call on governments to respond to public health emergency as NSW air pollution reaches unprecedented levels

28 health and medical groups today released a joint statement calling on the Federal and NSW governments to respond to the public health emergency in NSW created by the ongoing air pollution from bushfire smoke.

The groups include: Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), Australasian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM), Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA), Lung Foundation Australia (LFA), Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF). See the full list of signatories in the [joint statement here](#) or below.

Comments:

Climate and Health Alliance Executive Director Fiona Armstrong:

“This is a public health emergency. Both the Federal and the State Government of NSW must prioritise action to help reduce risks to people’s health from the air pollution from the bushfires and to implement measures to help alleviate the health and climate crisis.

“Climate change is going to get much worse and we will see more and more of these events. We must take the kinds of actions on climate change that scientists are calling for: dramatic cuts in emissions within the next few years or we’ll see warming potentially spiral out of control and we won’t be able to stop it.”

Media contact: Adam Pulford, 0424 885 387

Royal Australasian College of Physicians Fellow Dr Kate Charlesworth:

“Climate-related health effects are having the most impact on our most vulnerable: babies, children, the elderly and people with pre-existing disease. There is no safe level of air pollution. To protect health, we need to shift rapidly away from fossil fuels and towards cleaner, healthier and safer forms of energy.”

“Doctors are increasingly seeing the health-related impacts of climate change on our patients and communities. Just as we spoke up on asbestos and tobacco, so we have a responsibility to speak up on climate change.”

Media contact: Kate Charlesworth, 0400 380 210

Australasian College of Emergency Medicine President Dr John Bonning:

“Hospital emergency departments (EDs) are at the forefront of treating the impacts from these catastrophic bushfires.

“With projections showing that climate change will cause a significant rise in the number of overall ED presentations, an increase in the complexity of presentations as well as surges resulting from climate disasters, this medical emergency needs an emergency response.”

Media contact: Andrew MacDonald, 0498 068 023

Public Health Association of Australia President David Templeman:

“It is vital to acknowledge the immediate priorities linked to personal safety, mental health and well being, including trauma to those actually personally affected.

“But in facing what will soon coming our way, we need a plan to address forest and grassland management practice, emergency management funding and training for all firefighting professionals (career and volunteer). There is also action needed on house design regulations, zoning regulations, and other factors that will help to reduce the risks from future warming and climate disruption.”

Media contact: Terry Slevin, 0419 901 599

Doctors for the Environment Australia spokesperson Dr Lai Heng Foong:

“Pollution from bushfire smoke remains hazardous to people, in the short term and also the long-term. This public health emergency will disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, including young children, the elderly and those with existing chronic diseases, such as asthma.

“The NSW and QLD bushfires are a sign of what’s to come. In the coming summers, we can expect not only a bushfire season, but also a smoke haze season. The effects of climate change are upon us now, and we can no longer delay action to mitigate against these effects.”

Media contact: Dr Lai Heng Foong, 0404 225 368

Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand President Professor Bruce Thompson:

“It is logical and reasonable for us, as respiratory health professionals, to act on the strength of the evidence before us. And the evidence is clear: climate change is a medical emergency that is already impacting the health of our patients.”

TSANZ recently declared that climate change is a medical emergency. [Read their full statement.](#)

Lung Foundation Australia CEO Mark Brooke expressed his support for the statement and call for a [National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being](#), saying it was the right of every Australian to have healthy lungs and clean air.

“Climate change and air quality significantly contribute to poor lung health, increased health and economic burden, disability and death. If we want to prevent the worst air pollution from bushfire smoke, one of the best things our governments can do, aside from fuel reduction burns, is to set stronger and better standards for everyday air quality.”

Full list of signatories to joint statement:

- [Climate and Health Alliance](#)
- [Doctors for the Environment Australia](#)
- [Royal Australasian College of Physicians](#)
- [Australasian College for Emergency Medicine](#)
- [Consumers Health Forum of Australia](#)
- [College of Emergency Nursing Australasia](#)
- [The Thoracic Society of Australia & New Zealand](#)
- [Lung Foundation Australia](#)
- [Public Health Association of Australia](#)
- [Australian College of Nursing](#)
- [Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation](#)
- [Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association](#)
- [Asthma Australia](#)
- [NSW Nurses & Midwives' Association](#)
- [Queensland Nurses & Midwives' Union](#)
- [Australian Medical Students' Association](#)
- [Australian Health Promotion Association](#)
- [Australasian College of Health Service Management](#)
- [Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association](#)
- [Australasian Epidemiological Association](#)
- [Australian Association of Social Workers](#)
- [cohealth](#)
- [Dietitians Association of Australia](#)
- [Health Services Union Victoria Number 4 Branch](#)
- [Healthy Futures](#)
- [Medical Scientists Association of Victoria](#)
- [Australian Institute of Health Innovation](#)
- [Madden Sainsbury Foundation](#)