

2020 Queensland Election Briefing: Climate Change, Health and Wellbeing: opportunities to boost resilience

A recent comprehensive assessment on climate change and health by the international collaboration *Lancet Countdown* makes clear that climate change has a substantial impact on people's health worldwide, and is affecting the health of every person alive today.

It also reveals the delayed response to acting on climate change over the past 25 years has jeopardised life and livelihoods.

It highlights the essential role of the health professions and the health sector in driving forward action and realising health benefits from climate action, and emphasises the many opportunities to protect and promote health through climate action, if we act now.¹

Queensland has experienced record breaking heatwaves, floods and bushfires - all in the last two years.

Investing in climate action in Queensland to protect health, strengthen health services, and boost resilience in the community, is pragmatic and necessary, and can deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits.

The H-CAP

The Queensland government is taking commendable first steps towards building climate resilience in the state's health and wellbeing system. Committing to implement the Queensland Climate Adaptation Strategy (Q-CAS), and the related [Human Health and Wellbeing Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) (H-CAP) sets Queensland on a path to addressing climate and health challenges. The Health Minister's announcement on October 15, committing to invest \$50 million for solar panels on 50 hospitals across the state, and to establish a new Office of Hospital Sustainability within the Department of Health are welcome examples of Queensland's leadership in climate and health action.

The HCAP was written in 2018 with the intention of building health sector capacity and boosting resilience. The government's progress is laudable, but much more needs to be

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)32464-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)32464-9/fulltext)

done to act on the plan and ensure health systems are prepared to respond to potential compounding climate and health threats. **The Queensland government has a one-time opportunity to capitalise on its efforts by committing to funding the implementation of more of the HCAP's Priority Adaptation Measures (PAMs).**

The Queensland government's leadership is equally important in the context of COVID. COVID has demonstrated the need for integrated disaster responses to reach and support all segments of state populations in emergencies. Climate forecasts indicate increasing likelihood of concurrent and complicated disasters over time, for example, potentially having to evacuate citizens from flooded regions post-cyclone, in heatwave conditions, and during a pandemic. Such a scenario is possible as early as this summer.

As the H-CAP recognises, there is a strong association between environmental degradation, climate change and the increase of infectious diseases, like COVID-19. The current pandemic only underscores the urgent need to act on climate change to avert further public health crises. Queensland's success at handling the pandemic to date has demonstrated that the government can act decisively to protect the population against major threats to health, and Queenslanders can and will take collective action for collective benefit.

Recommendations for action

We recommend the **following investments** in health promoting actions which will create more jobs, support post-COVID recovery, and boost Queensland's climate readiness:

1. Health promoting and emissions reducing policies

Accelerate the transition to a renewable powered Queensland, to create jobs, reduce emissions, and reduce climate-related health risks by:

- a. expanding existing initiatives and installing solar on all public buildings, including hospitals, schools, libraries and correctional facilities (PAM 6: Economics and financing); and
- b. committing to 100% renewable energy for Queensland by 2035, and capitalising on the emerging opportunities for clean energy powered manufacturing in Queensland to supply this industry for which the state has such a strong natural advantage (PAM 6: Economics and financing).

2. Health sector resilience

- a. Expand the Office of Hospital Sustainability to a Healthcare Sustainability Unit that encompasses all areas of the health care system and establish a Qld based position to coordinate the local network of Global Green and Healthy Hospitals - to actively promote the network and provide practical support for regional and local HHSD across Queensland to enhance climate change resilience and environmental sustainability of the health system (PAM 1: Leadership and governance).

2. Building capacity in the sector and the community

- a. Support and resource Hospitals and Health Service Districts to undertake climate risk assessments and adaptation planning (using *Climate Change Adaptation Planning Guidelines and Template for Hospital and Health Services in Queensland*) (PAM 2: Sector capacity and PAM 4: Risk management and legal liability).
- b. Support and resource Hospitals and Health Service Districts to establish a Queensland Green and Healthy Hospitals pilot project to identify pathways to net zero healthcare (PAM 2: Sector capacity and PAM 7: Cross-agency collaboration).
- c. Recognise the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Indigenous cultural knowledge and practice in building resilience to climate change and provide opportunities and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and groups to share this with others (PAM 2: Community capacity).

3. Protecting the community

- a. Fund climate vulnerability and adaptation assessments for all regional areas in Queensland with a focus on at-risk population groups (eg elderly, people with chronic illnesses) (PAM 3: Specific public health measures).
- b. Boost heatwave readiness before summer: ensure adequate heat shelters or cooling centres are located or built for vulnerable individuals and groups, including rural and remote Queenslanders (PAM 3: Specific public health measures).
- c. Invest in community mental health programs (e.g. resilience workshops, counselling services) that recognise the effects of climate change and environmental degradation and support people suffering from climate anxiety and

distress due to climate change impacts on health, lives, livelihoods (PAM 3: Specific public health measures).

4. Research, data and evaluation

- a. Fund research to evaluate the economic value of health benefits arising from climate mitigation and adaptation strategies (PAM 5: Research, data and evaluation).
- b. Provide funding to expand monitoring and reporting systems for climate-related health presentations in emergency departments (e.g. heat-stress, dust-storm induced asthma). Health services should work with inter-sectoral partners including ambulance and emergency services and the Bureau of Meteorology to optimise the value and utility of such a system for preparation and warning systems (PAM 5: Research, data and evaluation).

5. Education and communication

- a. Evaluate community knowledge and awareness on climate health impacts, using the method of community survey, modelled on the example provided by Sustainability Victoria's [survey](#) (PAM 8: Education and communication).
- b. Develop an engaging community education campaign to raise awareness of, and promote resilience to risks arising from our changing climate (e.g. more exposure to heat and other dangerous weather events, mental distress, risk of infectious diseases) (PAM 8: Education and communication).

6. Infrastructure, technology and service delivery

- a. Fund a program to retrofit all existing health service infrastructure to improve energy efficiency, boost climate resilience, enhance energy and water security (based on local results of the climate risk assessment and planning process). (PAM 10: Infrastructure, technology and service delivery).

Signatories:

