



CLIMATE AND HEALTH ALLIANCE

Australians left critically vulnerable to climate change: health experts warn

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Leading medical experts say Australia's health system is unprepared for the impacts of climate change, leaving communities unnecessarily exposed.

In a national first, the Climate and Health Alliance surveyed more than 130 peak health bodies, unions and health professionals – including doctors, nurses, midwives, public health practitioners and psychologists – to evaluate the sector's preparedness for the impacts of climate change.

The results uncovered major gaps and widespread concerns, revealing:

- Health experts consider the government's Direct Action Plan a failure (52% considered it "not at all effective")
- 78% think Australia's current climate policies are inconsistent with our international obligations, including the Paris Agreement
- Nearly 90% of respondents were aware of how people's health could benefit from climate mitigation and adaptation strategies

"The results of our survey were explicit and urgent," said Dr Liz Hanna, President of the Climate and Health Alliance.

"Health care professionals are deeply concerned that neither the Coalition nor Labor appear to have any idea of the threat posed by climate change to our physical and mental health."

In Australia, climate change is already increasing heat-related illnesses and deaths, outbreaks of infectious diseases, mental illness and stress associated with extreme weather events, and risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, among others.

Public Health Association of Australia's Dr Peter Tait, a former GP of the Year, said: "That ignorance is putting communities unnecessarily at risk from illness, accidents and stressors that could be managed with a national health strategy.

"It is time for a national strategy to build our resilience and response capacity as climate change increasingly impacts vulnerable communities over the next decade."

The survey also revealed:

- High level of concern about the exposure of Australian patients to serious health issues worsening under climate change (ranging from food insecurity, to injuries and deaths, to vector-borne and infectious disease)

- Huge gaps in state and federal planning, with two thirds (65%) of the experts surveyed unable to name a policy in place designed to cope with what's being described as "the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century"[1]; and
- An urgent need to address the situation, with almost universal agreement (98%) with the call for a national strategy on climate, health and well-being.

"These results make three points abundantly clear," Dr Tait said. "First, Australia is totally unprepared for the health impacts of climate change. Secondly, the health sector is demanding a national strategy in order to build resilience and a robust health response to this emerging dilemma. Lastly, that we are running out of time to make our communities as safe as possible, and that responsibility lies at the feet of the federal government."

This survey came on the heels of a recent global survey that found Australia lags behind comparable countries when it comes to protecting the health of its citizens from climate change, and has failed to recognise climate change related health impacts in its national climate change policies and planning efforts.

The survey to respond to the [***Discussion Paper: Towards a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being***](#) remains open and can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T6WN5VJ>. The Discussion Paper (which includes a copy of the survey itself), can be downloaded here: <http://caha.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CAHA-Discussion-Paper-v04.pdf>

Download a copy of the preliminary report into the survey results here: <http://caha.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/CAHA-Survey-quotes-FINAL-lowres.pdf>

For media interviews, contact: Zoe on 0400 144 794 or zoe@climatemediacentre.org.au

[1] <http://www.who.int/globalchange/global-campaign/cop21/en/>