



CLIMATE AND
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

Media Release

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Human lives being lost due to inaction on climate: major new international health study

A major new health report reveals the failure of nations, including Australia, to tackle climate change is jeopardizing human lives and livelihoods around the world.

The Lancet Countdown 2030 report, released today, reveals 125 million vulnerable adults have been exposed to heatwaves since 2010, with an additional one billion facing exposure by 2040.

An accompanying Australian Policy Brief highlights the need for all levels of government to prioritise health in climate change responses, which should include phasing out coal, tightening emissions regulations in transport and building sectors, and integrating health in climate policy, as per the example of the health sector led Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia, released in June 2017.

According to the Lancet Countdown report, the failure to arrest global warming and accompanying heatwaves is leading to a fall in agricultural labour productivity, which in turn threatens the livelihoods of millions of farmers. This is affecting crop production and food availability, with rice yields falling 10% with every additional 1C of global warming. The frequency of weather related disasters, which have increased 46% from 2000, cause loss of life, contribute to injuries and spread of disease, and are often followed by long running mental health impacts.

The authors of the multinational study, involving 24 institutions from around the world, including the World Bank, World Health Organization, University College London, and Tsinghua University, say there needs to be a “need to see a step-change from governments in efforts to tackle both the cause and impacts of climate change”.

Unless urgent action on climate change is taken by high emitting countries, over one billion people globally will need to migrate within ninety years due to a rise in sea level caused by ice shelf collapse.

Although progress has been historically slow, there are signs of an accelerated response in the past 5 years, and in 2017, “momentum is building across a number of sectors; the direction of travel is set, with clear and unprecedented opportunities for public health.”

A statement issued with the report said: “The world has already begun to embark on a path to a low-carbon and healthier world. Whilst the pace of action must greatly accelerate, the direction of travel is set. The health benefits on offer are monumental, just as the alternative costs of inaction are stark, inexcusable and ultimately counted in preventable loss of life.”

Dr Peter Sainsbury, President of the Climate and Health Alliance in Australia, said the report showed the catastrophic consequences for human populations from the failure of national governments to play a role in the global task of reducing emissions.

“While governments fiddle, people are dying from this failure to face the facts and consequences of global warming. This is writ large in Australia, with the federal government refusing to commit to the kinds of initiatives we know will dramatically reduce emissions and in so doing, improve public health now and into the future. Governments could be doing much more to support the roll-out of affordable renewable energy for communities across the country. This would reduce emissions and reduce illnesses associated with pollution – which the Lancet Countdown report highlights is a major health risk associated with energy and transport emissions in capital cities.”

The Lancet Countdown Australian Policy Brief includes a case study on the Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia, developed and released by 34 health organisations, led by the Climate and Health Alliance, in June 2017, suggesting this provides “tangible strategies with measurable outcomes” as well as “key structural and organisational opportunities for Australia to mitigate climate change”.

Key figures from the Lancet Countdown Australian Policy Brief:

- An average of 117,260 additional vulnerable people (aged over 65) exposed to heatwaves between 2000 and 2016 (compared with 1986-2008)
- With the majority of Australia’s major cities located along the coastline, urban infrastructure (and urban populations) are particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels, storm and tidal surges and coastal erosion – and the associated economic costs. Eg in Western Australia, a sea level rise of 1.1m puts 9000km of road and 114km of railways (valued at AU\$11.8 billion), at risk of inundation.

Key climate-health impacts from the Lancet Countdown Australian Policy Brief

- Australians are being exposed to harmful air pollution from coal production and bushfires
- More needs to be done to reduce urban air pollution by investing in sustainable transport infrastructure

Recommendations from the Lancet Countdown Australian Policy Brief:

- Australian Government to bring health and climate change to the fore of political discussions, to highlight the challenges being experienced now and future health risks posed by climate change
- A National Climate and Health Strategy must be developed and implemented by the Australian Government to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach for tackling health and climate change challenges in Australia.

The Lancet Countdown report is available at: <http://www.lancetcountdown.org>

The Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia is available at: <http://www.caha.org.au/national-strategy-climate-health-wellbeing>

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