



## Practice Matters

# Midwives Can Lead on Climate Change

Maria McConkey, Climate and Health Alliance

**The impacts of a changing climate affect people when they are harmed physically or psychologically by extreme heat, bush fires, droughts, flood and the spread of vector-borne disease associated with increases in land and sea temperatures. Often these impacts are felt most severely by those living in rural settings, disadvantaged communities or with a lack of access to appropriate health services.**

Midwives have a unique insight into the effects such impacts have on the communities and individuals they

support, and have exposure to the increasing pressure placed on health systems to deliver adequate healthcare in a changing climate.

Midwives around the world are actively engaged in promoting environmentally sustainable strategies and lobbying governments to act on climate change impacts. The New Zealand College of Midwives led the development of a position statement calling for urgent climate action in 2014 that was adopted by the International Confederation of Midwives (2014). Representing 300,000 midwives from

102 nations, the Confederation recognises the serious impacts climate change will have on women and their babies – as well as the midwives who care for them.

Environmental action by midwives can also have a profound impact on the communities they work within. In the small town of Kadoma, in Zimbabwe, a program has been set up to celebrate the work of maternal services by planting an indigenous tree for every live birth at Rimuka maternity home. The project celebrates each newborn while also assisting to curb the effects of climate change on a country already experiencing prolonged drought and an extended hot, dry season. Lindelwe Mgodla, from *Gender Links* contends that women working on farms in rural Zimbabwe will be most affected by a changing climate.

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) ([www.caha.org.au](http://www.caha.org.au)) is a nation-wide community of stakeholders who advocate and campaign for policy action to address the health impacts of climate change. CAHA has recently launched a national campaign to encourage action by the federal health minister, Sussan Ley, urging her to uphold Australia's commitment to the Paris Agreement as negotiated during the United Nations Climate Change conference held in Paris in November 2015. When 195 countries ratified the agreement in April this year they committed to adopt mitigation and adaptation policies that reduce the risks and impacts of climate change. CAHA's latest campaign aims to develop a framework on which a National Strategy for Climate, Health and Well-being can be built and includes a discussion paper, an online forum and survey. Midwives are encouraged to respond to the *Discussion Paper: Towards a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia* via an online survey available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T6WN5VJ>.

A week-long online discussion forum in August enabled health professionals and health stakeholders from all disciplines to discuss ideas and concerns with experts in an open and informal space. These discussions and the responses from the survey will guide conversations at a round table meeting of health leaders in October, and be used to inform a policy proposal to go the federal government.

Midwives have a vital role to play in the preparation of women and their children for a hotter, more uncertain future. CAHA provides a platform for health stakeholders to have their say. To get involved, email [convenor@caha.org.au](mailto:convenor@caha.org.au), complete the survey or use the online petition to send a letter to your MP and Senators – visit: <http://climateandhealth.good.do/act-on-climate-to-protect-health/email-your-local-mp-and-senators/>

## Reference

International Confederation of Midwives 2014, Impact of climate change [online]. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/zwlmpz3> [Accessed 25 Aug. 2016]. ■

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