



# CLIMATE AND HEALTH ALLIANCE

Report from the 2018 Climate and Health Symposium

Ross House, Melbourne

21<sup>st</sup> September 2018



## Background

The 2018 Climate and Health Symposium was held in Melbourne on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2018, where approximately 60 attendees gathered to discuss issues of climate and health in Australia. Attendees represented the health sector, local and state government, professional and industrial associations, not for profit organisations, as well as research, academia, environmental organisations and civil society.

Hosted by Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), the Symposium aimed to create opportunities for collaboration and was an important and all too rare chance to share challenges, successes and opportunities surrounding climate change and health. It was also an opportunity to generate momentum to help accelerate coordinated and effective action.



### The objectives of the Symposium were as follows:

1. Identify how to frame climate change as a critical public health issue to policy makers and the media
2. Raise awareness of research, policy, and advocacy initiatives on climate change and health in Australia
3. Engage and build the community of professionals dedicated to climate and health action
4. Generate momentum and commitments for action on climate and health

With the objectives in mind, a number of invited speakers were asked to give “lightning talks” on the latest policy, advocacy, research, and communications on climate change and health, including within the healthcare sector. From these talks, and the general discussion that followed, five core themes from the Symposium were identified. These themes are described below and will be discussed in greater detail within the report.

### The core themes of the Symposium were as follows:

1. Communicating climate change and health
2. The research agenda: priorities and gaps
3. Climate and health advocacy campaigns
4. Policy windows and opportunities
5. Climate smart healthcare

A summary of the discussion from each of the core themes appears below.

## 1. Communicating Climate Change and Health

Communicating the health effects of climate change was a strong and recurring theme throughout the Symposium. Many attendees identified the need for more effective communication techniques, including the use of specific language and targeted messages, when engaging with the general public and healthcare stakeholders.



Dianna McDonald from Sustainability Victoria advised that it is necessary to ‘join the dots’ for the general public when communicating the effects of climate change on health. However, once the public recognises the health issues involved, they are more inclined to want to take action. This was described as being particularly evident when people understand that climate change will compromise the quality and availability of food and water in the future.

**“Information has to be repeated often to large audiences, but most importantly, it must come from trusted voices” –**

Stephanie Hall, Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub

In order to raise awareness and spread the message, several attendees identified the need for simple information to be repeated often, to large audiences, and from trusted sources. Mass media can be used as a tool to spread this message, although challenges exist. Current initiatives at Monash University include engagement with weather presenters to communicate climate and weather messages. Kate Noble from the City of Melbourne also confirmed that health professionals have an important role to play as trusted members of the community. Emphasising the health co-benefits of taking action on climate change should be included in the message that is communicated.

From the knowledge shared at the Symposium, it is evident that there are still many challenges associated with communicating the message of climate change as a health issue. However, there is also empirical evidence to guide future communications so that they are effective in raising awareness and concern about climate change and health.

## **2. The Research Agenda: Priorities and Gaps**

Several academics identified the disjointed approach to climate and health research currently in Australia and pointed to the opportunity for a more strategic research agenda. Dr Rebecca Patrick from Deakin University called for better intra-sectorial coordination between research institutions in order to identify and address the priorities for climate and health research in Australia. Annabelle Workman from the Australian-German Climate and Energy College pointed to the need to assess the data gaps, and consider what research is required to help policy makers in Australia integrate health and climate change into their agenda.

**“At the moment there is a disjointed approach to climate change and health research in Australia”**

Annabelle Workman, Australian-German Climate and Energy College

In her lightning talk, Dr Ying Zhang from the University of Sydney also addressed the need for research to guide policy decisions. She suggested that Australia lags behind other comparable countries on many indicators of climate and health, but also indicated that there are many opportunities and capacities for climate action in Australia in the coming years. Her research will continue to help guide policy in Australia in order to address the impact of climate change on health.

## **3. Climate and Health Advocacy Campaigns**

Elizabeth Foley from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation expressed the need for health professionals across the board to give the same message to politicians when it comes to action on climate change and health. In addition to this, many attendees pointed to the need for university curricula for all health professions to include climate change. In particular, Sarah Stewart from the Australian College of Midwives expressed the need for key health organisations to be strategic at a national level to achieve this. Again, this discussion pointed to greater coordination and collaboration to achieve action on climate change and health.

**“Increasing community awareness is vital - to make political inaction indefensible”**

Ian Lowe, Griffith University



Danielle Schutte, a CAHA Volunteer and a Master of Public Health student, spoke about her experience as a climate and health advocate. She reported that many people in the community feel their lack of scientific knowledge about climate change is a barrier to becoming an advocate. This indicates the ongoing need for training opportunities to prepare climate and health champions so that they can use their voice to bring about change in climate policy.

#### 4. Policy Windows and Opportunities

Sue Cooke gave a lightning talk on the development of the Human Health and Wellbeing Climate Adaptation Plan in Queensland. She spoke to the “strong appetite” of health service providers to build resilience and generate an adaptation plan for climate and health. With such strong backing for this plan in Queensland there is hope that other states and territories will also get on board, with Victoria also implementing a pilot adaptation plan. Katherine Middleton from the Australian Medical Students’ Association followed up the discussion of state-led action by pointing to the example of the US, where state governments are committing to climate action even without the support of the federal government.



Annabel Workman indicated from her research that a key barrier surrounding the implementation of climate and health policy is the difficulty of communicating the benefits of climate action. In order to respond to these challenges, the benefits need to be framed in a more compelling way, often including the monetisation of benefits.

In general, there was a consensus among the room that both mitigation and adaptation strategies are necessary. Additionally, for Australia to be adequately prepared to deal with the health effects of a changing climate, policy strategies must be implemented at all levels of government, and across all sectors.

## 5. Climate Smart Healthcare

Several members of the Pacific region of the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Network were present at the Symposium and spoke on behalf of their organisations about the work they were doing to create sustainable health services.



Cath O'Shea gave a lightning talk about the work being done to improve sustainability practices at Western Health, from the high-level governance of a sustainability committee to local sustainability action plans. Similarly, Aileen Thoms explained how Kooweerup Regional Health Services are including sustainability in all aspects of the hospital, from policy decisions to personal action by individuals. This has in part been achieved by integrating sustainability principles into position descriptions, interviews, and orientations so that the conversation is always live. In terms of other action being taken by the hospital, CEO Frank Megens discussed the reduction of green waste, and the addition of solar panels to reduce energy costs but admitted that it was a slow process.

Among the room many other attendees also commented that progress in their respective fields was slow, but that momentum for the climate and health issue is building and starting to move in the right direction.

### **Additional comments from the Symposium**

Throughout the Symposium, there were several recurring comments made across all themes that should be summarised briefly. First, as touched on already, there was an overwhelming agreement that greater collaboration among health organisations, government bodies, academia, and health professionals is necessary. Second, climate change as a public health issue should be included in all health professional education, whether that be at university or through professional development training. Finally, there were several comments that spoke to the progress being made in the climate and health sphere that raised hope for more effective and targeted action in the future.

The symposium concluded with CAHA Executive Director Fiona Armstrong mapping a path forward within the space of climate and health. This included a summary of the opportunities for future collaboration and the priorities for immediate action as expressed by those who attended and participated in the Symposium.

**Opportunities and priorities:**

1. Coordinate and convene work on research agenda
2. Convening conversations on education - perhaps establishing a working group
3. Supporting health professionals and health sector actors to be effective communicators on climate change and health and climate solutions
4. Bringing the insights and perspectives from health to inform policy
5. Help make it politically possible!
6. Training for health service executives and boards on climate change and climate risk
7. Continue to support health services and share their stories to accelerate action in healthcare itself
8. Advocacy around accreditation and quality and safety frameworks
9. Measuring air pollution at hospitals and health services

Climate change is a critical public health issue and Symposium participants agreed policy makers should act accordingly. Increasing awareness about climate change and its harmful effects on health is critical to this. While mitigation and adaptation of climate change can be supported by collaboration across different fields, it is vital that health professionals and health organisations lead and inform responses on climate change and health.

A video recording of the Symposium is available at: <https://youtu.be/8dwllKcZUDA>

*This report was prepared by Milly Burgess.*

## Appendix A

### Lightning Talks

Harriet McCallum – Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation  
Dianna McDonald – Sustainability Victoria  
Ying Zhang – School of Public Health, University of Sydney  
Michelle Isles – ClimateWorks  
Jo Walker – National Rural Health Alliance  
Sue Cooke – Climate and Health Alliance  
Cath O’Shea – Western Health

### Attendees

Annabelle Workman	Jane Maxwell
Adeline Stuart-Watt	Joanne Walker
Lori-Anne Sharp	John Iser
Katherine Evans	Kate Noble
Amanda Adrian	Kathy Faulkner
Amulya Bandi	Caroline Gibson
Aram Hosie	Kristen Pearson
Bronwyn Aylmer	Lisa Rasmussen
Catherine O’Shea	Tim Woodruff
Christopher Turner	Marianne Cannon
Conor Sibly	Frank Megens
Danielle Schutte	Melanie Lowe
Dan Brown	Melissa Sweet
Aileen Thoms	Michelle Isles
Dawn G Lee	Clare Mitchell
Dianna McDonald	Mitchell Neto
Dianne Couch	Ngaire McGaw
Elizabeth Foley	Nick Horsburgh
Ewa Mazuruk	Nicole Bartholomeusz
Finn Romanes	Patricia Nayna Schwerdtle
Graham Hill	Peter Sainsbury
Harriet McCallum	Phoebe Rountree
Ian Lowe	Zoe Heath
Ingrid Johnston	Rae Walker



Rebecca Patrick

Roslyn Morgan

Sandra Falconer

Sarah Bending

Sarah Stewart

Stephanie Hall

Sue Cooke

Siarn Wilson

Katherine Middleton

Vanora Mulvenna

Vivien Engassner