



CLIMATE AND
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

Submission to Federal Budget

Recommendations for a health-led post COVID-19 economic recovery (building on the Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Wellbeing for Australia)

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About the Climate and Health Alliance

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is a national charity and the peak body on climate change and health in Australia. CAHA is an alliance of organisations within the health sector working together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions.

The membership of CAHA includes a broad cross-section of health sector stakeholders with 45 member organisations, representing healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as healthcare service providers, institutions, academics, researchers, and consumers. Information about CAHA's membership and governance can be found at www.caha.org.au.

The Climate and Health Alliance has produced a significant number of reports and publications to assist policymakers and inform health stakeholders and the wider community understand the links between climate change and health, and to guide decisions regarding policy and solutions.

These include the [Human Health and Wellbeing Adaptation Plan for Queensland](#); [Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia](#) and the preceding [Discussion Paper](#); a [Review of Health and Climate Change Literature](#) for the City of Melbourne; a joint report on divestment [Healthy Investments](#) (with Doctors for the Environment); the seminal report [Coal and Health in the Hunter: Lessons from One Valley for the World](#); a multi-stakeholder [Joint Position Statement and Background Paper on Health and Energy Choices](#); a joint report 'Our Uncashed Dividend' (with The Climate Institute) on the health benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions; [Discussion Paper for the Roundtable on the Health Implications of Energy Policy](#) and a subsequent [Briefing Paper](#) on the same topic.

CAHA has produced a film on the risks to health and climate from coal and gas, [The Human Cost of Power](#); and has conducted many innovative and groundbreaking public events, including a annual series of [Greening the Healthcare Sector Forums](#), including several [Healthcare Environmental Sustainability Forums](#) with Western Health and Institute for Hospital Engineers Australia; the [Our Climate Our Health Seminar](#), featuring an innovative thought experiment: [Imagining 2030 as a healthy low carbon world](#); a [Public Seminar on Protecting Health from Climate Change](#) (with University of NSW); and a national [Forum on Climate and Health: Research, Policy and Advocacy](#). CAHA also contributes to many conferences, community dialogues, and forums, both nationally and internationally on these issues.

For more information about the membership and governance of the Climate and Health Alliance, please see Appendix A. For further information see www.caha.org.au

Introduction

COVID-19 has shaken our society and economy. Governments around the world put in place unprecedented measures to protect their citizens and minimise fall-out. Australia has managed to avoid its health services being overrun and has comparatively low numbers of infections and deaths from COVID. Yet, the fall-out from the illness and the containment measures and put in place by federal and state governments have led to a widespread economic downturn. Australia's society and economy will remain affected by the impacts for COVID 19 for many years to come.

Australia's response by its government and people has shown the potential for drastic change and swift reactions. As we now look to rebuild our economy, we must make use of the opportunity to re-shape our society for a sustainable, resilient and healthy future.

COVID-19 has also highlighted the links between environmental and human health. Environmental degradation, in particular land-clearing, has been linked to the rise of zoonotic diseases, such as COVID-19. Rising temperatures further accelerate the rise of infectious diseases. To avoid fall-outs from health and environmental disasters, federal and state governments must integrate public health and climate preparedness. Doing so will also safeguard long-term economic recovery.

CAHA has put forward policy recommendations that recognise these links.

In our Framework for a National Strategy on Climate and Health, we outline necessary reforms in seven previously identified key areas to create a healthy, resilient society. Given the interconnectedness of human and environmental health, highlighted by COVID-19, we are adding an additional policy area, relating to thriving ecosystems.

By investing in measures that meet these criteria, the federal government will be able to maximise its reach and simulate a fast recovery with fiscal and health co-benefits. These measures set the path for long-term resilience, economic security, environmental protection, and a flourishing human society.

We call on the government to fund measures under these following key areas to contribute to a healthy, regenerative, and just society and economy:

1. Supporting healthy and resilient communities

Enhancing the capacities of communities to anticipate their climate risks and reduce impacts on health and well-being in their communities. Supporting community resilience to avert future potential health and climate crises, including pandemics.

- a. Resource and support community-based health and social services organisations to develop their understanding of climate risks to service delivery and the population groups they serve, especially vulnerable groups.
- b. Increase funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and community services.
- c. Support the development of renewable energy infrastructure projects in rural, regional and remote communities in any construction-focused stimulus packages.
- d. Fund capacity building initiatives in culture, conservation and science, expanding Indigenous Ranger programs, and boosting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander -led businesses and participation in adaptation and resilience, including carbon farming.

2. A sustainable and climate-resilient health care sector

A low/zero carbon, environmentally sustainable, climate-resilient health sector which can effectively respond to the health impacts of climate change and unforeseen health emergencies, including new infectious diseases and/or pandemics.

- a. Establish a national agency to advise on sustainability initiatives in the health care sector, such as a national Sustainability Development Unit to provide guidance and capacity building to health care providers and government departments, and realise savings for health sector budgets.
- b. Introduce mandatory standards and obligations for health facility design, construction and ongoing management of both new and existing facilities, which prioritise environmentally sustainable, low emissions design and operations.
- c. Establish national standards for sustainable procurement in healthcare, to guide purchasing and support the transition to a circular economy.
- d. Invest in development / expansion of the manufacturing industry for medical supplies, including PPE, with a focus on using / producing materials that can be safely sterilised and re-used where appropriate.
- e. Invest in our national vaccine research and production capacity and fund an Australian production facility.
- f. Further invest in telehealth and teleconferencing services to improve access to healthcare, and minimise travel for staff, clinicians and patients.
- g. Fund the installation of solar panels (with batteries) for all metropolitan as well as rural hospitals and health services.
- h. Provide grants to support energy efficiency improvements in hospitals and health services.
- i. Provide grants for waste or energy audits for hospitals to inform waste and energy and water saving initiatives.
- j. Establish a national program to reduce the use of plastics in healthcare and significantly expand recycling efforts.

3. Health-promoting and emission-reducing initiatives

Measures that reduce the risks to people's health and well-being while simultaneously reducing greenhouse gas emissions and avoiding air pollution.

Energy efficiency

- a. Upgrade all publicly-owned buildings and operations so they are energy efficient.
- b. Invest in 'shovel-ready' energy storage projects, such as large-scale batteries.
- c. Remove barriers to grid connection for large-scale solar and wind energy generation.
- d. Accelerate the closure of coal-fired power stations to allow an expanded proportion of electricity to be provided by renewable energy.
- e. Support small businesses to invest in solar power and storage.
- f. Fast-track electricity transmission infrastructure for low cost, reliable renewable energy.
- g. Increase investment in sustainable industries by reallocating fossil fuel subsidies.

Housing

- h. Invest in new social housing infrastructure, and ensure it is thermally efficient, and climate resilient to reduce running costs and improve health
- i. Install solar panels on all new housing and all public / social housing
- j. Ensure all existing social and affordable housing is “climate ready”, to limit heat and cold stress for those unable to access or afford heating and cooling systems.
- k. Provide solar grants for community housing organisations to support access to a more affordable power supply.
- l. Invest in programs to weatherproof and energy retro-fit residential buildings
- m. Upgrade infrastructure to be safe during extreme heat events, including equipping public housing with adequate cooling infrastructure and building heat refuges.¹
- n. Amend the National Construction Code to incorporate health protection and climate resilience measures to withstand temperature extremes and natural disasters.

Transport

- o. Expand electric, public and active transport manufacturing and infrastructure, including charging stations for electric vehicles.
- p. Replace federal government car fleets with electric vehicles.
- q. Provide funding for local and state governments to invest in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

4. Emergency and disaster-preparedness

Supporting the identification of vulnerable populations and gaps in infrastructure in order to adequately prepare for the impacts of climate change and compound crises, such as future health threats.

- a. Expand investment in early warning systems to identify climate-related threats to health, such as extreme weather events, to enable rapid response to mitigate the impacts on Australian communities.
- b. Increase support for disaster preparedness and emergency services to respond to climate related hazards and disasters to avoid catastrophes.
- c. Expand investment in climate and health vulnerability mapping programs to identify and map vulnerable populations and infrastructure to inform climate adaptation strategies and emergency response plans.
- d. Support the establishment of integrated climate and pandemic preparedness plans across national and state/territory and local government.
- e. Support the establishment of locally led disaster recovery initiatives to build capacity and support the agency of affected people and communities.
- f. Fund urban planning measures for heat abatement (tree planting, storm-water gardens, etc).
- g. Support development and roll out of Indigenous fire management and natural resource management programs, creating employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to advise local and state fire authorities (particularly those in rural and regional and remote areas).

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S221209551830124X?via%3Dihub>

5. Education and capacity building

Educating and raising awareness of the health impacts of climate change within the health workforce and the wider Australian community so they can adopt health-protective adaptation behaviours and realise the health benefits of reducing emissions. Equipping health professionals and the community with knowledge and tools to prepare for potential concurrent climate and health emergencies.

- a. Develop a national educational campaign to inform communities about the health risks of climate change, health-protective adaptation strategies, and the health benefits of reducing emissions and transitioning to a low-carbon future. This should include a focus on people and groups who are specifically vulnerable to climate change, such as those with chronic illnesses, those sensitive to heat and poor air quality, those that are being displaced, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose connection to the country is integral to health and wellbeing. Ensure these programs are accessible to migrant and refugee communities, and available in multiple languages and formats to ensure accessibility for all.
- b. Support the establishment of a national education and training framework to support health professionals in recognising, preparing for and responding to the health impacts of climate change - to guide undergraduate and postgraduate curricula and continuing professional development.
- c. Promote low emissions and healthy dietary habits and reduction on food waste by funding research, education, and behaviour change programs to support this.
- d. Develop a national certification and labelling scheme for products to communicate embodied carbon and to guide consumer behaviour towards low carbon choices.

6. Leadership and governance

Establishing effective governance arrangements for implementing climate change and health initiatives at the national level.

- a. Establish or nominate a National Agency (liaising with and supported by the Department of Health) to advise on climate change and environmental health risks, with responsibility for evaluating and monitoring of outcomes and effectiveness of programs and initiatives already in effect and those proposed in this submission.
- b. Establish a national Ministerial Forum on Health and Climate Change to facilitate cooperation and leadership across multiple portfolios and at all levels of government on climate and health policy and programs.
- c. Establish a strong national framework for sustainable consumption and production that is integrated into national and sectoral plans, encourages sustainable business practices and consumer behaviour, and ensures adherence to international norms in relation to management of hazardous chemicals and wastes.

7. Research and data

Supporting Australia's health and climate research capacity to evaluate specific health threats, priority needs and to monitor trends and opportunities for maximising multi-sector benefit.

- a. Establish and fund a world class climate and health research and health capacity that enables evaluation of priority needs and supports a response to Australia's specific health threats, as well as supporting climate-health research.

- b. Conduct a national assessment of climate and health vulnerability and impacts to guide program development and support adaptation and mitigation actions.
- c. Establish national health surveillance systems to ensure climate change and environmental health threats are identified and appropriate responses developed, thereby ensuring the best possible physical and social health and well-being of the community, including through:
 - Establishing a national environmental health surveillance system which includes climate-related indicators.
 - Providing continued investment in and support for the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance Network, including a strong focus on disease outbreaks which may increase in frequency and severity as a result of climate change (for example vector and zoonotic borne disease outbreaks, such as SARS-COV-2)
- d. Conduct an assessment of health-related economic benefits (i.e. co-benefits) to be gained from pro-health climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies that result from building community resilience, improved air quality, active transport options, and other co-benefits associated with emissions reductions.

8. Thriving ecosystems

Restoring and safeguarding Australia's ecosystems, recognising that intact ecosystems are the fundamental base of human health and livelihoods.

- a. Expand conservation programs to preserve natural environments, including wilderness areas and national parks. Invest in the following job-intensive initiatives to: ²
 - Encourage utilization and protection of national parks and wilderness areas, recognising their role in healthy human development and long-term health and wellbeing, as well as provide profound mental and physical health benefits;
 - Enhance and maintain national park infrastructure and tracks, and support ongoing park management (fire, weeds, feral animals) - coupled with programs to build skills and capacity among long term unemployed and disadvantaged young people;
 - Support bushfire recovery and resilience activities, including infrastructure repairs and habitat restoration;
 - Expand river and wetland restoration, including fencing, revegetation and erosion control;
 - Increase tree planting and habitat restoration in metropolitan, suburban, peri-urban and rural areas;
 - Establish fund for Indigenous ranger programs to create jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and enhance environmental management and biodiversity conservation;
 - Support coastal habitat restoration and monitoring, in partnership with local communities and the fishing industry; and
 - Expand plastics and marine debris clean up, including research to inform future policy decisions.

² These initiatives were developed by a collation of conservation groups and the National Farmers' Association and submitted to the Prime Minister. Details on estimated numbers of job creations can be found here. <https://www.rainforestrescue.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/prime-minister-re-economic-stimulus-in-conservation-and-land-managementatt-20-apr-2020.pdf>

- b. Expand initiatives to promote a sustainable food production system that recognises the risks of climate change and environmental limits, including:
 - Providing incentives for farmers to invest in low emission technologies, soil conservation, and regenerative agriculture practices;
 - Investing in sustainable water strategies and water infrastructure to support food production in a warming climate.
- c. Provide support for state, territory and local government programs to protect and restore biodiversity as a planning priority in urban areas recognising that the loss of green spaces in urban areas contributes to increased emissions, poorer air quality, and the urban heat island effect.
- d. Support development and roll out of Indigenous fire management and natural resource management programs, creating employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to advise local and state fire authorities (particularly those in rural and regional and remote areas).
- e. Establish a National Environmental Protection Fund to support biodiversity and ecosystem protection and long-term nature conservation.

APPENDIX A

Climate and Health Alliance Board

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CAHA Member Organisations

Abilita
Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)
Australian College of Nursing (ACN)
Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
Australasian Epidemiological Association (AEA)
Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA)
Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA)
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Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA)
Australian Psychological Society (APS)
Central Australia Rural Practitioners Association (CARPA)
Children's Healthcare Australasia
Codesain
CoHealth
ConNetica Consulting
Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF)
CRANaplus

Doctors for Nutrition
Doctors Reform Society (DRS)
Friends of CAHA
Health Consumers NSW
Healthy Futures
Health Issues Centre (HIC)
Health Nature Sustainability Research Group (HNSRG)
Health Services Union (HSU)
Kooverup Regional Health Service (KRHS)
Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAWP) Australia
Medical Scientists Association of Victoria (MSAV)
Naturopaths and Herbalists Association of Australia (NHAA)
NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA)
Pharmacists for the Environment Australia (PEA)
Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA)
Psychology for a Safe Climate (PSC)
Royal Australasian College of Physicians
Queensland Nurses and Midwives Union (QNMU)
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School of Public Health & Social Work, Queensland University of Technology
Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH)
Veterinarians for Climate Action (VFCA)
Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA)
Women's Health East (WHE)
Women's Health in the North (WHIN)
Women's Healthcare Australasia