



CLIMATE^{AND}
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

Submission to National Preventive Health Strategy Consultation Paper

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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 around 40 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 fossil fuels, [The Human Cost of Power](#); and has conducted many innovative and ground breaking public events, including an 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

The issue

The World Health Organization has described climate change as the defining issue for public health in the 21st century. It is an urgent challenge, with implications at the global, national and community levels.

Climate change affects health in many ways; directly by the increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as prolonged heatwaves, floods and bushfires; and indirectly through worsening air quality, changes in the spread of infectious and vector-borne diseases, risks to food safety and drinking water quality, and effects on mental health.

Climate change is contributing to the collapse of ecosystems and biodiversity, undermining the foundations for health and wellbeing. It is leading to a decline in habitable land, economic hardship due to loss of livelihoods, coastal inundation, forced internal migration, and the loss of homelands and disrupted connections to country.¹

Climate change contributes to an increased risk of infectious diseases, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, asthma, allergies, mental illness, psychosocial impacts, violence, poor nutrition, injury, poisoning and mortality.²

As a result, health care services are adversely affected, with those living in rural and remote areas, who may already have increased risk of ill health because of limited access to services, impacted most severely.³ Health care services in Australia have experienced dramatic increases in service demand from climate change-related extreme weather events, including heatwaves, storms, floods, as well as bushfires and associated smoke pollution.⁴

Tackling climate change not only results in savings for the health sector but provides net economic benefits across multiple sectors. In Europe, estimated annual benefits from climate change mitigation (through reduced air pollution and associated mortality and health care costs) is €17-38 billion by 2050, with additional annual savings on air pollution control measures nearly €50 billion. In the US, it is estimated emissions reduction strategies could provide an annual economic benefit between US\$6-30 billion, if implemented.⁵

¹ Climate and Health Alliance, Climate change is a health issue, Briefing Paper No.1, 2018. Available at: https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/caha/pages/33/attachments/original/1539054808/CAHA_Briefing_Paper_1_Climate_change_is_a_health_issue_2018.pdf?1539054808

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

⁵ ibid

A Preventive Health Strategy that is fit for purpose in the 21st century must address climate change — or it will fail in its objectives.

Responses to specific questions in Paper / Inquiry

The online submissions form asks several questions. We have provided responses to **questions 4, 5, 6 and 8.**

4. Are the vision and aims appropriate for the next 10 years? Why or why not?

The goal of the National Preventive Health Strategy should be to tackle the systems that undermine the determinants of positive health and wellbeing.

The vision and aims of the National Preventive Health Strategy will only be achieved if we include recognition of the social, environmental⁶ and planetary⁷ determinants of health. The risks these imply need to be considered in terms of their contribution to ill health. We must develop programs to address each of the determinants (climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, air pollution, climate grief, heatwaves, extreme weather, infectious disease, vector borne disease, poverty, water insecurity, food insecurity) if we are to be successful in addressing these preventable threats to health.

5. Are these the right goals to achieve the vision and aims of the Strategy. Why or why not? Is anything missing?

The foundations of a resilient society involve good health — and ensuring the conditions to foster good health across the community must be a priority for all governments.

The elements of good health include the absence of disease, optimal physical and mental health, equity and fairness in access to conditions for optimal health and healthcare. Key contributing factors to good health and wellbeing are social conditions, and environmental and planetary conditions.

⁶ Social and environmental determinants of health are the full set of social and physical conditions in which people live and work, including socioeconomic, demographic, environmental and cultural factors, along with the health system. See: https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/185217/Social-and-environmental-determinants-Fact-Sheet.pdf

⁷ The concept of planetary health is based on the understanding that human health and human civilisation depend on flourishing natural systems and the wise stewardship of those natural systems. However, natural systems are being degraded to an extent unprecedented in human history. See: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60901-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60901-1/fulltext)

Climate change is a significant influence on the **social determinants of health**, defined by the World Health Organization as ‘the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.’ The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities, or the avoidable differences in health status, seen within and between countries. These include factors such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, identity, gender, housing, food security, employment and the urban environment.

A focus on prevention of illness, diseases and injury associated with **environmental and planetary determinants of health** (global warming, climate change and the health impacts of emissions intensive industries) must be a critical element in the National Preventive Health Strategy.

Modifiable risk factors related to climate change and planetary health are our energy intensive energy and transport systems, environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

The health impacts associated with these risk factors are amplified by the current failure to act on these threats through mitigation (emissions reductions), coupled with a failure to invest in adaptation to protect the community from climate-health threats.

Australia is committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 3 of the SDGs is Good Health and Wellbeing: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, and Goal 13 is Climate Action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.⁸

In its commitment to the SDGs, Australia has declared: “The SDGs reflect things that Australians value highly and seek to protect, like a healthy environment, access to opportunity and services, human rights, inclusive economies, diverse and supportive communities and our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage.

Our support for political, economic and religious freedoms, liberal democracy, the rule of law, equality and mutual respect underpin a strong, fair and cohesive society. Core to the Australian understanding of the SDGs is the Australian value of a “fair go”. Like “leaving no one behind”, it is a call to action for fairness, justice and equality of opportunity.”⁹

All 17 SDGs are relevant to preventive health.

⁸ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/australia>

6. Are these the right actions to mobilise a prevention system?

The following policy directions are key to reducing the disease burden and avoidable deaths and illness from climate change (and its drivers):¹⁰

1. **Investing in emissions-reducing and health-promoting policies.** Policies that achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes and minimise risks while reducing greenhouse gas emissions are win-win options. Fortunately, many carefully designed climate mitigation policies (particularly in the areas of energy, transport, planning, and food/agriculture) can achieve both of these goals. A rapid transition towards renewable energy resources for energy and transport will reduce incidence of cardiovascular, respiratory and other illnesses related to air pollution associated with fossil fuel combustion.
2. **Investing in emergency and disaster preparedness.** Climate change is predicted to increase both the frequency and severity of extreme events such as storms, flooding and heatwaves for Australia. Protecting the health and wellbeing of communities from the impacts of these events requires building the capacity of health and emergency services to identify vulnerabilities and to prepare and adequately respond. This includes increasing the ability of health and emergency services to respond to challenging or unexpected events, such as megafires, extreme storms, or thunderstorm asthma, which may present unpredictably in a changing climate.
3. **Supporting healthy and resilient communities.** The National Preventive Health Strategy should include a focus on enhancing the capacities of community-based health and social service organisations and local governments to support communities in preparing for climate-related events and emergencies, minimising their impacts on health and wellbeing, and facilitating adaptation and resilience over the short, medium and long-term. Healthy and resilient communities also rely on a healthy natural environment and thriving ecosystems.
4. **Education and capacity building.** While most Australians recognise that climate change is occurring, policies that educate and raise awareness of the health impacts of climate change help build

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https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/caha/pages/40/attachments/original/1498008324/CAHA_Framework_for_a_National_Strategy_on_Climate_Health_and_Well-being_v05_SCREEN_%28Full_Report%29.pdf?1498008324

resilience in the Australian community as well as within the health workforce. Processes and mechanisms for targeted communication and engagement are needed to help to overcome psychological distancing, motivational issues, perverse incentives and information asymmetry to enhance adoption of energy efficient, low emission and climate-resilient lifestyles and behaviours.

5. **Leadership and governance.** The success of a National Preventive Health Strategy will depend on leadership and collaboration both vertically (across national, state and local governments) and horizontally (across multiple sectors and within the health sector itself). Approaches that promote collaboration will enhance the effectiveness of the overall strategy and ensure the health and wellbeing of Australians is protected in the most efficient and informed manner. The success of the strategy will also depend on investment in human resources across government and the health sector more broadly to prepare for, respond to and adapt to predicted health threats, including from climate change.
6. **A sustainable and climate-resilient health sector.** The carbon and environmental footprint of the healthcare sector in Australia is unsustainable. There is significant scope and opportunity for reducing both greenhouse gas emissions and the environmental footprint of the health sector. The evidence demonstrates that a low carbon and environmentally sustainable health sector would deliver demonstrable health, economic, social and environmental benefits. Unless there is significant investment in addressing climate risk and climate resilience in the health sector, Australia will be unable to continue to deliver high-quality and safe care due to exposure to climate risks.
7. **Research and data.** Understanding of the implications of climate change for the Australian population is necessary if we are to effectively respond to its challenges. This requires investment in Australian research, as well as collaborative partnerships with international researchers, to generate evidence and experience. This should include: identifying near and long-term health threats, and the development and evaluation of health protecting adaptation strategies; assessment and forecasting of climate change health impacts across Australia's climatic zones; 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; assessment of the most effective interventions to mitigate risks from climate-sensitive infectious diseases (for example vector and zoonotic borne diseases); and identifying, documenting and monitoring the psychological and social impacts of the ongoing threat of climate change and associated issues relating to indirect exposure. It should also include monitoring the burden of disease related to energy and transport systems, as well as progress against a set of indicators that relate to known climate change health risks, as well as health impact assessment for all new infrastructure projects.

8. **Thriving ecosystems.** The health of human populations is fundamentally dependent on healthy environmental systems to sustain us. Many are sensitive to climatic change, including food yields, water supplies, mediating against infectious diseases, and protection against weather extremes (by reefs, forests, mangroves etc).¹¹ A fundamental principle of health prevention is the restoration of a healthy natural environment and thriving ecosystems to meet the biophysical needs of the population - for clean air, fresh water, shelter, food production, a stable climate, and management of waste streams, and for psychological, cultural and spiritual wellbeing. Greater awareness of these fundamental links through the National Preventive Health Strategy will promote engagement and reinforce environmental protection as a health promotion and illness prevention initiative.

Concluding remarks

These recommendations are consistent with the well documented evidence in medical and health literature. Analysis of global and national action on climate change and health in the international medical journal *The Lancet*, for example, makes plain the life of every child born today will be profoundly affected by climate change, with populations around the world increasingly facing extremes of weather, food and water insecurity, changing patterns of infectious disease, and a less certain future. This research also makes clear that efforts to limit global average temperature rise could yield enormous health dividends for the public and the economy, and lead to cleaner air, safer cities, and healthier diets.

These recommendations are consistent with international frameworks Australia is a signatory to, including the Sustainable Development Goals, in

¹¹ <https://www.pnas.org/content/109/13/4730>

which Good Health and Wellbeing and Climate Action are both recognised as key goals; and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in which everyone in Australia has the right to the highest attainable standards for physical and mental health.

These recommendations consistent with policy at the state and territory level. For example, in Victoria, the Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023 recognises that climate change is a leading threat to health and wellbeing; in Qld, the Human Health and Wellbeing Climate Adaptation Plan emphasises the need to consider specific vulnerabilities in the population to climate change and implement measures to reduce avoidable morbidity and mortality. In WA, Climate-Health Inquiry has reviewed the planning and response capacity of the health system in relation to the health impacts of climate change, and a forthcoming report will make recommendations with respect to climate change mitigation and public health adaptation strategies. In Tasmania, a Climate Change Health Impact and Risk Assessment Tool to support evaluation of the health impacts of climate change has been piloted. In NT, the Department of Health has established a Climate Change Health Advisory Group (CCHAG) to help focus departmental efforts on climate change.

While these initiatives at the sub-national level are important, this is occurring in the absence of an overarching policy directive at the federal level. Leadership and action at the national level from the Commonwealth Government is vital.

APPENDIX A

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CoHealth
ConNetica Consulting
Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF)
CRANApplus
Doctors for Nutrition
Doctors Reform Society (DRS)
Friends of CAHA
Health Consumers NSW
Healthy Futures
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