

# The National Strategy for Climate, Health and Well-being: a briefer.



## ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

**What it is:** The Campaign for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia has been developed because there is a national policy failure to respond to the health risks of the climate crisis.

**The climate crisis and health:** Health professionals have a responsibility, but also a tremendous opportunity, to act on the climate crisis. Two leading international medical journals have described the climate crisis as a “health emergency”. The leading publication on global climate change and health research, the 2015 Health and Climate Commission, published by the international medical journal The Lancet, found that climate change presents an “unacceptably high and potentially catastrophic risk to human health”. At the same time, there is strong evidence to show that actions to address the climate crisis could be tremendously beneficial for human health and reduce health costs: these are ‘co-benefits’.

**A National Strategy:** Australia has no national policy to respond to the health risks nor to act on these opportunities. A 2015 global survey of national climate change and health plans revealed that Australia lags behind comparable countries in its response to the health risks of the climate crisis. The global climate agreement (the Paris Agreement) obliges nations to consider their citizens’ ‘right to health’ in the context of climate policy. A National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being would assist Australia in meeting its international obligations under the Paris agreement. It would provide a comprehensive, integrated, national approach to addressing the health risks of climate change, to ensure policies to reduce emissions also reduce risks to health, to maximise co-benefits for health and well-being, and to support climate resilience in the health sector. A national consultation revealed 98% of surveyed health professionals support a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia.

**Campaign objective:** The goal of the campaign is to achieve the development and implementation of a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia.

**The process:** The campaign will work to develop a consensus among healthcare stakeholders, parliamentarians, policymakers and the wider community about the core elements of a National Strategy and to mobilise health professionals and organisations to advocate for the realisation of this policy goal.

In 2016, the first year of the campaign, campaign milestones were exceeded. A Core Organising Group and Support Committee was established. A Discussion Paper was circulated to 350 healthcare stakeholders, and over 130 health professionals and organisations responded to the accompanying Survey to respond to the proposal for a National Strategy. A National Online Discussion Forum was held, followed by a historic Health Leaders Roundtable in Canberra in October. This brought together around 40 President, CEOs, and policy leaders of health organisations to discuss the key elements of a national strategy, and was attended by the Assistant Minister for Health, Shadow Minister for Health and Greens Party Leader.

In 2017 we have developed the Framework for the National Strategy, and commenced the training, advocacy and lobbying phase of the campaign. This involves a three-day intensive education and training program for 25 health professionals, to build a strong cohort of advocates across the health sector. In addition to this, support will be provided on an ongoing basis to healthcare professionals to advocate in their workplace to build support for the strategy, and to meet with their MP/Senator. There will also be lobbying actions, media efforts and an online campaign, to build political pressure for the strategy.

**Supporters:**





## THE FRAMEWORK COVERS SEVEN AREAS OF POLICY ACTION



### 1. HEALTH-PROMOTING AND EMISSIONS-REDUCING POLICIES

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



### 2. 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.



### 3. 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.



### 4. EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Educating and raising awareness of the health impacts of climate change within the health workforce, and the wider Australian community.



### 5. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Establishing effective governance arrangements which facilitate horizontal and vertical collaboration in implementing climate change and health initiatives at the national level, and advocating and demonstrating leadership internationally on action to address the health impacts of climate change.



### 6. 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.

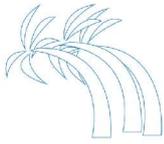


### 7. RESEARCH AND DATA

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 benefits.



## THE CURRENT AND PROJECTED IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON PUBLIC HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA INCLUDE:



### EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Increased intensity, duration and frequency of extreme weather events such as floods, storms and heatwaves, are placing increasing pressure on health services and infrastructure and putting more Australians at risk of illness, death and post-traumatic stress<sup>3,35,36,37</sup>



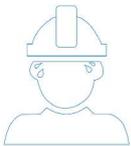
### INFECTIOUS DISEASES

A warmer climate and changing rainfall patterns will increase the range and prevalence of food, water and vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever (which is expected to reach northern NSW by 2100), parasitic (zoonotic) diseases, and the prevalence of illnesses resulting from exposure to pathogens<sup>36,39,40</sup>



### FOOD AND WATER SECURITY

Changes in prevailing weather patterns may threaten the security and quality of water sources and the productivity of major agricultural regions in Australia, with implications for ensuring food and water security for a growing population<sup>36,39,41,42</sup>



### OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IMPACTS

Hotter temperatures place outdoor and manual labourers at increased risk of heat-related illnesses, work accidents and death, while the increased incidence of extreme weather events increases occupational risks for emergency services<sup>43,44,45</sup>



### MENTAL ILLNESS AND STRESS

Ongoing environmental change and more frequent and severe weather events, combined with the social and economic impacts of climate change, increase the risk that Australians will experience mental illness and stress<sup>41,42,46,47,48</sup>



### AEROALLERGENS AND AIR POLLUTION

Increases in atmospheric temperatures may lengthen the pollen season and alter chemical reactions of some air pollutants such as ozone and particulate matter, increasing exposure to aeroallergens and aggravating conditions such as allergic rhinitis, as well as heart and lung conditions including asthma, while increasing the risk of mortality<sup>41,49,50,51,52</sup>



### VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Vulnerable populations will suffer disproportionately the adverse health impacts of climate change in Australia, with people with pre-existing medical conditions, older people, young, disabled, socioeconomically disadvantaged and Indigenous Australians identified as being particularly vulnerable. Climate change places undue burden on those least responsible and least able to respond<sup>3,4,37,38,39,46,48,53,54</sup>