

AN OPEN LETTER TO POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

AUSTRALIAN ELECTION 2019

Climate change poses an unprecedented threat to the health of people in Australia and across the world.

We, the undersigned, call on all political parties and candidates in the upcoming federal election to:

- 1 Acknowledge the significant and profound impacts climate change has on the health of people and our health system.
- 2 Support the implementation of a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being, based on the Framework developed by health stakeholders.¹
- 3 Ensure the Strategy includes a credible, equitable and stable plan to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with emphasis on a rapid transition to renewable energy in the electricity and transport sectors.
- 4 Support rapid phase out of fossil fuel subsidies which contribute to climate change and health impacts.
- 5 Support the implementation of a plan to assist the health sector and the community, particularly people at risk, to adapt and build resilience to unavoidable climate change impacts already locked in.
- 6 Support a climate and health research program to evaluate specific threats to health in Australia from climate change and the burning of fossil fuels.

SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS



BACKGROUND

We are a group of organisations and individuals in the health, social and environment sectors calling on all parties and candidates to publicly recognise the significant and profound health impacts of climate change to Australian people. We need to urgently act to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and put in place a plan to adapt and build resilience to unavoidable climate change impacts from warming that has already occurred.

Australia has committed to the Paris Agreement and the goals of reducing global warming to well below 2 degrees, and pursuing 1.5 degrees. This commitment also includes an obligation for Australia to consider its citizens 'right to health' in the context of its national climate change response. But the response from successive governments to date has been woefully inadequate, and Australian peoples' health and lives are at risk.

Climate change has been described by the World Health Organization as a health emergency,² and by The Lancet medical journal as the greatest threat to health of the 21st century.³ These statements on the real health risks of climate change are backed by several decades of national and global scientific evidence, and the direct experience of hundreds of thousands of people experiencing the health impacts of climate change every day, and hundreds of thousands of deaths that have already occurred.

People experiencing poverty or disadvantage are most vulnerable to health impacts from climate change. There are more than 3 million people, including 739,000 children, living in poverty in Australia who struggle to afford the basics including adequate health care.⁴

The World Health Organization estimates by 2030 there will be 250,000 additional deaths each year attributable to climate change.⁵ The 2012 DARA report on climate vulnerability estimated deaths associated with climate change and the carbon economy (due to the pollution it produces) will rise to six million deaths per year by 2030.⁶

The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Global Warming of 1.5 Degrees report provides incontrovertible evidence that the "climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are projected to increase with global warming of 1.5°C and increase further with 2°C."

THE RECENT LANCET COUNTDOWN REPORT⁷ CONCLUDED:

- 1 Present day changes in heat waves, labour capacity, vector-borne disease, and food security provide early warning of the compounded and overwhelming impacts on public health that are expected if temperatures continue to rise. Trends in climate change impacts, exposures, and vulnerabilities show an unacceptably high level of risk for the current and future health of populations across the world.
- 2 A lack of progress in reducing emissions and building adaptive capacity threatens both human lives and the viability of the national health systems they depend on, with the potential to disrupt core public health infrastructure and overwhelm health services.
- 3 Despite these delays, a number of sectors have seen the beginning of a low-carbon transition, and it is clear that the nature and scale of the response to climate change will be the determining factor in shaping the health of nations for centuries to come.
- 4 Ensuring a widespread understanding of climate change as a central public health issue will be crucial in delivering an accelerated response, with the health profession beginning to rise to this challenge.

Health services in Australia are already experiencing the destructive effects of climate change, which is damaging vital health infrastructure, impacting the health workforce, and putting at risk the ability of some services to continue to provide care for the community.⁸ These threats will only amplify in the future, putting more lives at risk.

These risks and consequences cannot be managed through the existing health system. Reports from the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) national consultation with Australian health professionals confirm the Australian health sector is ill-prepared to manage the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities and the healthcare system.⁹

Well-designed climate policies however offer an unprecedented opportunity to improve health and well-being.¹⁰ Investing in climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable healthcare is vital to reduce

emissions in the sector and ensure the delivery of safe, quality care into the future.¹¹

The organisations listed here support a Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being to guide this work. We acknowledge the Australian Labor Party's commitment to implement a National Climate, Health and Well-being Plan based on this Framework if elected to govern,¹² and the support of The Greens. We call upon the Coalition to make a similar commitment.

We stand ready to assist the next Australian Government to further develop and implement comprehensive policy to avoid further loss of life, injury and illness that will inevitably result if there is any further delay. Climate change poses an unprecedented threat to the health of people in Australia and across the world.

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS

- **Dr Ann Borda**, PhD, CHIA, Associate Professor.
- **Dr Peter Sainsbury**, Adjunct Associate Professor, Public Health, School of Public Health.
- **Professor Gerry FitzGerald MD**, FACEM, FRACMA, FCHSM.
- **Dr Liz Hanna PhD**, MPH, BA, RCCN, RN FPHAA, FACN.
- **Harriet Barker**, MESSS, RN, Grad Dip Midwifery.
- **Sarah Stewart**, Chief Operations Officer, Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives.
- **Dr Tim Woodruff**, President, Doctors Reform Society.
- **Professor Lucie Rychetnik** (MPH, PhD), School of Medicine Sydney, University of Notre Dame Australia.
- **Ms Danielle Schutte**, BA.
- **Frank Megens**, RN, RM, M. Health Administration.
- **S.M. Cooke**, MPH, Sessional Lecturer, Climate Change and Health.
- **Dr Sinead Boylan** (PhD), Executive Officer, Climate Change, Human Health and Social Impacts Node, The University of Sydney.
- **Peter Brooks** AM MD FRACP FAFPHM, Hon Professor Centre for Health Policy, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health.
- **Dr Elizabeth Haworth**, Senior Research Fellow, University of Tasmania.
- **Professor Jennifer Martin**, School of Medicine and Public Health, University of Newcastle.
- **Distinguished Professor Stewart Lockie** (PhD, FASSA) Director, The Cairns Institute, James Cook University.
- **Dr Tammra Warby** BSc, MBBS, PhD, FRACGP Co-Lead Global Planetary Health Declaration Project.
- **Prof John Wiseman**, Adjunct Professor, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne.
- **Dr David Harley**, Visiting Fellow, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health.
- **Dr Celia McMichael**, School of Geography, The University of Melbourne.
- **Associate Professor Grant Blashki**, MD MBBS FRACGP GAICD University of Melbourne.
- **Hilary Bambrick**, Professor and Head of School, School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology.
- **Dr Kathryn Bowen**, Hon. Senior Research Fellow, Research School of Population Health, Australian National University, Consultant, World Health Organization (Climate Change and Human Health).
- **Professor Melissa Haswell**, MSc, PhD, School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology.
- **Rob Moodie**, AM MBBS MPH FAFPHM FRACGP Professor of Public Health, Deputy Head, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health.
- **Maxine Whittaker** MBBS MPH PhD FAFPHM GAICD, Dean, College of Public Health; Co-Director WHO Collaborating Centre for Vector Borne and Neglected Tropical Diseases.

REFERENCES

- 1 The *Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia* is available at: <https://bit.ly/2sSoMbu>
- 2 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/28/climate-change-already-a-health-emergency-say-experts>
- 3 Watts, N. et al, The 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: shaping the health of nations for centuries to come. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)32594-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)32594-7/fulltext)
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- 6 DARA Climate Vulnerability Monitor (2012) <https://daraint.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/EXECUTIVE-AND-TECHNICAL-SUMMARY.pdf>
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