

Climate Change and Health

Extreme weather events associated with climate change can significantly impact health and threaten health care sustainability.

Vulnerable populations are likely to experience greater climate change related health impacts. These populations include children, the elderly, socio-economically disadvantaged people, people living with chronic disease, people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people living in geographically vulnerable locations (coastal regions, rural and remote areas, etc.).

Cross sectoral, coordinated healthcare is necessary to respond to community need, particularly during extreme weather events.

In Australia, climate related health issues have been attributed to increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events including heatwaves, severe storms, floods, droughts, bushfires and deteriorating air quality. Weather changes are leading to shifts in temperature, water distribution, food growing patterns and vector borne diseases.

These events have substantial and ongoing impacts to physical and mental health.

Australia's health sector is directly responsible for 7% of carbon emissions in Australia, providing significant scope for the sector to reduce its carbon footprint. Hospitals and the pharmaceutical industry are the biggest contributors responsible for two thirds of all health sector carbon contributions.

Work has been initiated by state and territory governments to address the carbon footprint of health care and incorporate climate change into health policy agendas. However, the Australian Government is yet to demonstrate a policy commitment to address the impacts of climate change on health.

AHHA POSITION:

- ❖ Governments at all levels should implement policies that promote health system sustainability through addressing climate change.
- ❖ Health systems and providers should be supported to appropriately plan and prepare for extreme weather events and emerging health challenges resulting from climate change.

- ❖ Leadership should be demonstrated by the Australian Government with a national response to address climate change and health. A policy framework to coordinate action across all levels of government is needed, drawing on the Climate and Health Alliance's Framework for a National Strategy for Climate, Health and Well-being.
- ❖ Environmental sustainability should also be encompassed in the national vision and strategy for outcomes-focused, value-based health care, with a deliberate focus on supporting populations who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
- ❖ The health sector should demonstrate leadership on climate change action through commitments to net zero emissions, cross-sector and inter-agency partnerships and dedicated workforce positions that initiate and support health system environmental sustainability.
- ❖ Government must initiate and support standardised climate related health outcome data collection at all levels of the health sector to track patient and population progress over time, facilitate benchmarking and initiate system wide efficiency and patient experience improvements.
- ❖ Health workforce strategies and plans must incorporate the impact of climate change into the design and development of sustainable models of workforce distribution, ensure health workforce education and training addresses the impact of climate on health, and support profession specific leadership on issues of climate and health.
- ❖ Governments must implement health service funding models that incentivise innovation and environmental sustainability (e.g., blended payment models, low interest loans).
- ❖ The process of health technology assessment should be expanded to consider the environmental impacts of technologies across the entire life cycle of these products from raw material acquisition and manufacturing to waste disposal throughout care pathways.
- ❖ Climate and health research must be supported to inform decision making in response to climate and health threats.