

Committee Secretary

Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee

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Dear Members of the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee,

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023.

As two leading organizations at the intersection of nursing, primary health care, and climate health in Australia, the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) and the Climate Action Nurses (CAN) are deeply committed to advancing the well-being of all Australians and ensuring the sustainability of our planet through regenerative healthcare. Our nursing profession stands as the largest healthcare workforce, not only nationally but globally. We carry a profound responsibility to advocate for the health and welfare of our communities, and climate change is a paramount concern within this context.

The proposed Climate Change Amendment Bill of 2023 holds immense significance for nursing within primary healthcare. Our profession recognizes the intrinsic connection between a changing climate and the health of our patients, particularly the most vulnerable among us, including children, the elderly, and those with chronic illnesses. Therefore, we wholeheartedly endorse and support this critical piece of legislation.

The nursing profession, with its holistic and patient-centred approach, acknowledges that climate change is one of the most significant health crises of our time and, for future generations. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and the spread of vector-borne diseases pose significant threats to the well-being of Australians. Nurses witness the direct impact of climate change on our patients' health, from heat-related illnesses to exacerbations of respiratory conditions due to poor air quality and are well positioned to respond.¹

The Climate Change Amendment Bill aligns seamlessly with our profession's core values of equity, health for all, and advocacy. It is aligned with the International Council of Nurses Ethics², and the Nursing and Midwifery Board Standards of Practice.³ It is our duty as nurses, and more broadly as global citizens, to ensure that we do everything in our power to reverse the effects of climate change on human health. By taking strong measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across all industries, this Bill represents an essential step in safeguarding the health of future generations.

Furthermore, we emphasize the significance of this Bill's alignment with human rights principles, as highlighted in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁴ This document underlines children's rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment—an aspiration that resonates deeply with the nursing community. It reiterates nursing's commitment to preserving the right to life and the highest attainable standard of health for children.

We commend Senator David Pocock for his leadership in championing the health and well-being of current and future Australian children through the proposed amendments to the Climate Change Act 2022. While we acknowledge Australia's commitment to mitigating climate change, we are acutely aware of the government's ongoing support for the oil and gas industries, often under the guise of economic imperatives. Recent decisions, such as the extension of a number of coal mines and gas projects in Australia, are cause for concern among nurses, who bear witness to the health implications of such choices. The Intergenerational report⁵ underscores the important role that addressing climate change plays in Australia's economic health, with urgent climate action being synonymous with a prosperous nation. The amendments outlined in the Climate Change Amendment Bill of 2023 will make significant strides in curtailing approvals for fossil fuel extensions and developments. In doing so, we are proactively creating a healthier environment for our children and all Australians, now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,

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Key references:

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