



Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC

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Committee Secretary
The Environment and Communications References Committee of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Environment and Communications References Committee of the Senate (the Committee) Inquiry into Current and Future Impacts of Climate Change on Housing, Buildings and Infrastructure (the Inquiry).

NHMRC is Australia's leading expert body for supporting health and medical research, developing health advice for the Australian community, health professionals and governments and providing advice on ethical behaviour in health care and in the conduct of health and medical research.

Most NHMRC funding is awarded in response to investigator-initiated applications in which the research is conceived and developed by the researchers. A smaller proportion of funding is directed to specific areas of unmet need, e.g. through Targeted Calls for Research, special Centres of Research Excellence, Partnership Centres and some Partnership Projects. The primary criterion for all funding decisions is excellence. NHMRC relies on review by independent experts to identify the best applications, based on the significance of the research, the quality and feasibility of the research proposal and the track record of the investigators.

In the last ten years NHMRC has not received research applications that relate directly to the scope of the Inquiry; however, during this period NHMRC has funded a relatively small number of research grants that relate to the health impacts of climate change¹. These grants include research into altering patterns in the prevalence of infectious diseases that might occur in response to changes in the climate.

¹ Since 2008 NHMRC funded 20 research grants that relate to the health impacts of climate change. The total value of these grants was approximately \$17 million. NHMRC can provide further details if required.

In 2016 NHMRC allocated \$6.8 million over five years for the Northern Australia Tropical Disease Collaborative Research Programme, which aims to build strong collaborations, new research capability and capacity in the health and medical research workforce and to promote effective translation of this research into health policy and practice in Northern Australia. This investment is part of a broader Government strategy to build Australia's primary research capability and support the development of Northern Australia as outlined in the *White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* (2015).

The low number of climate change-related research applications received by NHMRC may indicate a need to build Australian capability in research on the health impacts of climate change, such as the effects of rising temperatures and extreme weather events. In future, NHMRC could stimulate and encourage climate change research either by making this topic a future priority for targeted research or by funding a Centre for Research Excellence in climate change research. Another option would be for NHMRC to fund a call for research jointly with another funding agency given the interdisciplinary nature of climate change research.

In relation to water supply, NHMRC contributes to the ongoing development of the National Water Quality Management Strategy (NWQMS). The NWQMS is a joint national approach to improving water quality in Australian and New Zealand waterways and is managed by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. As part of this work, NHMRC has developed a number of national guidelines that might be useful to the Committee in its deliberations, including:

- *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines* (2011) – updated November 2016
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/eh52>
- *Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water* (2008)
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/eh38>
- *Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling: Managing Health and Environmental Risks (Phase 2) Augmentation of Drinking Water Supplies* (2008)
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/eh56>

Additionally, NHMRC works with the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth), a standing committee of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, to determine priorities for water quality guidelines relating to health.

Please do not hesitate to contact Alan Singh, Executive Director, Research Policy and Translation, on
or if you require further information.

Yours sincerely

Professor Anne Kelso AO
Chief Executive Officer

21 July 2017