

Subject: Submission to Extreme Weather Inquiry

I am a health care professional and public health advocate. The health sector is almost completely unprepared for the impacts of the intensifying extreme weather events due to climate change which are beginning to be felt.

Increasing and intensifying extreme weather events associated with unmitigated climate change is already putting pressure on local, state and national government and business budgets. I agree with the submission to this enquiry from the Climate and Health Alliance, and in particular draw your attention to the following summary points and recommendations from that submission:

Human induced climate change is contributing to increases in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.

Extreme weather is threatening the lives and health of all Australians, but particularly those in rural and remote areas, those who are disadvantaged, poor, unwell, disabled, homeless, elderly, or very young, and those who are highly exposed.

The future impacts on health and wellbeing will continue to escalate as global warming increases and climate change contributes to more frequent and more severe weather events.

Health is and will continue to be harmed primarily by lack of mitigation, but is also at risk from a lack of investment in preparation at the community and health service sector, and capacity building in response and recovery.

The ability of the health sector to respond is compromised and there is an urgent need to improve the capacity of the health sector to manage future demand for services.

A national plan must be developed to protect health from climate change, including from extreme weather events, and implemented in cooperation with state, territory and local governments, civil society and community organisations and businesses.

As a national priority, and with the substantive response that a threat to national and global security demands, urgent action must be taken to reduce national greenhouse gas emissions in order for Australia to assume its fair share of the global responsibility to reduce emissions in order to arrest further climate change.

Despite growing awareness among many Australians about the links between climate change and extreme weather events, the lack of understanding of the scope and scale of implications for human health, and for all aspects of our economy and society, is cause for serious concern and should be addressed by the development of national programs to raise awareness about climate impacts and to encourage emissions reductions.

Given the serious and underestimated impacts on human health and wellbeing from extreme weather events, as well as the serious implications associated with the degree of unpreparedness in the Australian health system to respond, the Climate and Health Alliance calls on the Committee to host public hearings in each state and territory on health and extreme weather events to allow health professionals and health services and local communities to provide input to this Inquiry.

Recommendations

For the Australian Government:

Develop and implement a national plan to protect health from climate change, including a national heatwave plan

Legislate to achieve urgent and substantial national emissions reductions – this should include: a moratorium on further fossil fuel exploration and development; and the rapid removal of fossil fuel subsidies

Establish national programs to raise public awareness about climate

impacts and to encourage emissions reductions

Include Climate Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment in all government policy and program decisions

To strongly encourage other nations (particularly wealthy countries such as the US and Canada with high per capita emissions) to stand up to vested interests and act swiftly to reduce emissions to protect the health of current and future generations

For all Australian governments (federal, state, territory and local):

Establish and include ecological economic indicators in policy, program and development assessments.

Fund the development and delivery of quality professional development for health and other community services personnel on climate change causes, impacts and solutions.

Yours sincerely

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