



Climate change presents threat to global human health

17 May 2016

To avoid a catastrophe for human health, zero carbon emissions must be reached globally by 2050, according to a leading health and climate change expert.

Professor Peter Sainsbury's presentation at RACP Congress*, *Saving humanity involves a lot more than zero carbon emissions by 2050*, discusses how climate change presents a current and ongoing threat to human health both in Australasia and internationally.

He will be joined by RACP Australasian Faculty of Public Health President-Elect Professor Lynne Madden and Doctor George Laking, calling on individuals, groups, organisations and societies to be ready to respond to, and where possible prevent, adverse impacts of climate change on health.

"Most of us in developed countries are living in a (fossil) fool's paradise – enjoying the good life while ignoring that our behaviours are destroying the planet and depriving those less fortunate of a decent standard of life," said Professor Sainsbury.

"We need to start making dramatic changes to the way we power society and feed humans now. However focusing on reaching zero carbon emissions is not enough because there are other serious problems that must be addressed."

According to The World Health Organisation, current and future impacts of climate change on human health include:

- Direct impacts of climate change may result in injury, heat-related illness, exacerbation of cardiorespiratory disease, and premature mortality;
- Indirect impacts of climate change include increases in the prevalence of food and water-borne disease; deterioration in air quality; reduced access to food and safe drinking water; negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing;
- Flow-on effects of climate change that will impact on health systems and service provision include risks to global security including competition for resources, and stresses on health infrastructure and services.

"Although developing countries will be most vulnerable to these impacts, developed countries such as Australia and New Zealand will also be affected," Professor Sainsbury said.

There are significant health benefits from taking action on climate change, including reducing levels of chronic disease, respiratory and cardiovascular illness; improved life expectancy; less pressure on the healthcare system and improved workplace productivity.

Professor Sainsbury congratulated the RACP for being one of the leading medical organisations in Australia and New Zealand taking a strong position on climate change.

The RACP has been a long-term advocate for action against climate change. In 2015 the College launched an international campaign, *Doctors for Climate Action*, which called on world leaders to commit to real action on climate change at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21), in Paris last December.

In June 2015, the College was also one of the first health organisations globally to commit to divesting itself of all investments directly and materially involved with fossil fuels.

For more information on RACP Climate Change and Health Position Statement, [click here](#).

Editor's note: Professor Peter Sainsbury, Professor Lynne Madden and Doctor George Laking will be presenting *Climate Change/ Planetary Health* session at RACP Congress on Tuesday, May 17.

* RACP Congress 2016 brings together approximately 1000 of Australasia's leading medical specialists to discuss the latest developments in healthcare. This year's event is held in Adelaide from May 16 to 18.

Ends

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 15,000 physicians and 7,500 trainee physicians across Australia and New Zealand.

The College represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients.

The College offers 60 training pathways. These lead to the award of one of seven qualifications that align with 45 specialist titles recognised by the Medical Board of Australia or allow for registration in nine vocational scopes with the Medical Council of New Zealand.