

Media Release

RACP: Australians concerned about the health impact of extremely hot weather

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New research* from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) has revealed more than two thirds of Australians (68 per cent) are concerned about the rise in extremely hot weather and the impact it will have on health and wellbeing.

The topic of climate change and health will feature prominently at the World Congress on Public Health this week, with more than 2,000 health professionals descending on Melbourne for the World Federation of Public Health Associations event.

RACP Faculty of Public Health Medicine President-elect Associate Professor Linda Selvey, who will share the RACP research during her session this afternoon, said it was pleasing that the majority of Australians are united in viewing climate change as a significant health issue.

“There is undeniable evidence that climate change is fast becoming one of the most challenging global public health issues of the twenty-first century and one that could overshadow all others,” explained Associate Professor Linda Selvey.

“Left unchecked, extreme weather events, fires, disease, disruptions to food and water supply, loss of livelihoods and threats to human security will push us all towards a global public health emergency.

“Already in Australia, record-breaking heatwaves have seen significant increases in emergency department presentations, ambulance callouts, and higher rates of heat-related illness and mortality rates.

“Greater temperature increases in coming years will inevitably multiply health risks and put further stress on the health sector.”

Last year was the hottest year on record globally, the third successive year of records, reaching 1.1°C above the pre-industrial period. It was the fourth hottest year for Australia and new record highs were recorded in Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra.

Associate Professor Linda Selvey said the data is both comprehensive and conclusive and she called on the Government to introduce a national climate and health strategy.

“This would ensure that the impact of climate change on health and the health sector would be front and centre of Government deliberations when considering climate policy.

“A strategy would also result in greater collaboration between governments and provide greater impetus for action—both adaptation and mitigation, as well as stronger research, better disease monitoring, and education for healthcare professionals.

“The majority of Australians are concerned about the health risks of climate change – our research has made this very clear. A national climate and health strategy would go some way to reassuring Australians that governments are doing all they can to address this health crisis.”

Associate Professor Linda Selvey said the RACP had long recognised the health impact of climate change. In 2015, it launched its successful Doctors for Climate Action campaign which positioned it as a global leader on the issue. Last year, the RACP released [three Climate Change and Health Position Statements](#).

** Based on attitudinal research completed by Essential Media on behalf of the RACP in March 2017. Sample size of 1004 respondents.*

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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.