

Climate resilience: Equip our healthcare system so it is climate ready and climate friendly

The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC)ⁱ titled *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* represents a 'code red for humanity'. It identifies catastrophic impacts of climate change to Australia, including an increase in death, making it clear that this is a health emergency. Unless strong action is taken, Australia faces warming of up to 6 degrees since the preindustrial era by 2100. Climate change threatens to worsen food and water shortages, impact climate-sensitive diseases and increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. Health impacts, such as respiratory illness from bushfire smoke and heat stress, are already being seen.

Health systems are both part of the problem and the solution. Australia's health system contributes approximately 7% of the nation's CO₂ emissions.ⁱⁱ It is also the main line of defence for populations facing health threats resulting from the impacts of climate change including increased temperatures and climate-related extreme weather events.

Without urgent action, climate change will continue to have serious and worsening consequences for public health. To avoid the worst health impacts of climate change, global emissions must halve by 2030 and net zero achieved by 2050. Our international allies are committing to ambitious climate policies, but Australia remains a climate laggard.

Currently, state and territory governments adopt differing and at times diverging approaches to climate change and health. Commonwealth leadership is needed to align emissions reduction targets, strategies for sustainable healthcare systems and the coordination of policy and funding required to protect health and the health system from climate change impacts.

The RACP calls on the incoming Government **to make our healthcare system climate ready and climate friendly** by:

- Transitioning to zero emission renewable energy across all economic sectors with support to affected communities.
- Urgently implementing and funding a national climate change and health strategy to build climate resilience and an environmentally sustainable healthcare sector, including a plan to achieve net zero emissions in healthcare by 2040.
- Establishing a national healthcare sustainable development unit. The unit would draw on local best practice and leading international models, such as Greener NHS (and formerly the Sustainable Development Unit) in the UK.
- Appointing a national Chief Health Sustainability Officer to provide leadership, coordination and capacity building.
- Allocating dedicated funding for climate change and health mitigation and adaptation initiatives including national research funding, grant funding for states and territories, and funding for the development and scaling up of innovative projects at the local level.

ⁱ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* Online: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/> [last accessed 03/03/2022]

ⁱⁱ Malik, Arunima, et al. "The carbon footprint of Australian health care." *The Lancet Planetary Health* 2.1 (2018): e27-e35.