



From the President

4 August 2023

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via Email: a.albanese.mp@aph.gov.au

Dear Prime Minister

The RACP is concerned about the health harms of fossil fuels and calls for an urgent transition to clean renewable energy across Australia

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) trains, educates, and advocates on behalf of over 21,000 physicians and 9,000 trainee physicians, across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The RACP represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, infectious diseases medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine, rheumatology, and addiction medicine. The RACP is a member-led organisation committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients and the community.

The RACP is concerned about the direct and long-term health impacts of gas extraction to local populations. We recently wrote to the NT Chief Minister about the health impacts of fossil fuel extraction and use. This was following RACP members contacting the RACP about their health concerns about unconventional gas extraction in the Beetaloo Sub-basin.

Climate change harms health

Climate change and health is one of the RACP's priority policy areas and we have position statements on [Climate Change and Health](#), [Environmentally Sustainable Healthcare](#) and the [Health Benefits of Mitigating Climate Change](#). More recently the RACP commissioned a report - [Climate Change and Australia's Healthcare Systems – A Review of Literature, Policy and Practice](#), which has been endorsed by nine other medical colleges.

Climate change poses a significant health threat through impacts related to increasingly more frequent and intense extreme weather events, increasing temperatures, changes to vector-borne disease patterns, and worsening food and water shortages. Health consequences include heat stress; respiratory, gastrointestinal, and cardiovascular illness; injury; malnutrition, and psychological distress¹. Further, "climate change is compounding

¹ Climate Change and Health Position Statement (2016) RACP. https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/climate-change-and-health-position-statement.pdf?sfvrsn=5235361a_5

historical injustices and disrupts cultural and spiritual connections to Country that are central to health and wellbeing”² for First Nations people.

As a paediatrician, I am conscious of the importance of early childhood growth and development and the adverse and long-lasting impacts that extreme weather events, air pollution, and food insecurity can have on the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

The National Health and Climate Strategy is an opportunity to promote health

The RACP has welcomed the development of a National Health and Climate Strategy (Strategy) and I have been pleased to be part of the Chief Medical Officer Advisory Group informing this process. Our submission on the Strategy³ emphasises the need for healthy and climate resilient communities to be a key objective of the Strategy that is addressed through a Health in All Policies approach.

We are calling for the Strategy to be fully funded and resourced on an ongoing basis. Further, National Cabinet must sign off on the Strategy and establish a governance framework and funding mechanisms that enables urgent, coordinated, and effective implementation of the Strategy.

Cross-government action is needed to facilitate an urgent transition from fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy across all economic sectors. The RACP has called on all Australian governments to “require all fossil fuel extraction projects within their jurisdiction to undertake a full independent Health Impact Assessment before proceeding, including the effects on climate change”⁴. Fossil fuel combustion and extraction contribute significantly to climate change and cause other environmental impacts, including air pollution and water contamination.⁵ These in turn have harmful health impacts. An urgent transition to renewables will reduce future harm to health from climate change, as well as create health benefits through reduced air pollution and reduced occupational and environmental health hazards for workers involved in fossil fuel extraction.

The National Health and Climate Strategy is an important opportunity to address the threat that fossil fuel extraction and usage poses to health, and we hope to see this reflected in the final Strategy.

Please contact Nicola Lewis, Executive General Manager, Policy & Advocacy, via email at policy@racp.edu.au if you would like to discuss or require further information.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jacqueline Small

² Lowitja Institute. Climate Change and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Healthy Environments and Lives (HEAL) Network & Centre for Research Excellence in Strengthening Systems for Indigenous Health Care Equity (CRE-STRIDE) [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2023 Jul 21]. Available from: https://www.lowitja.org.au/content/Image/Lowitja_ClimateChangeHealth_1021_D10.pdf

³ [racp-submission-national-health-and-climate-strategy-consultation.pdf](#)

⁴ The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. The Health Benefits of Mitigating Climate Change Position Statement [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2023 Jul 25]. Available from: https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/health-benefits-of-mitigating-climate-change-position-statement.pdf?sfvrsn=3d34361a_5

⁵ As above.

CC: Hon Mark Butler MP
Hon Chris Bowen MP