



Joint media statement from medical colleges representing over 100,000 doctors, physicians, and medical experts

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Australia's healthcare system must get ready for the next climate disaster

Australia's healthcare system is finally starting to grapple with the risks to health and health systems that climate change poses. However, without urgent action healthcare systems will remain unprepared for the next climate disaster.

Climate change is causing an increase in extreme weather events and Australia is facing greater impacts of this than many other parts of the world.

The World Meteorological Organization has recently declared an El Niño and in Australia there is a 70% chance of an El Niño developing this year. An El Niño brings hotter temperatures, increased fire danger, and the potential for droughts.

We, as medical experts, are very concerned that Australian healthcare systems remain unprepared to handle extreme weather events that may be just around the corner.

We call on the Australian Government to urgently ensure that the National Health and Climate Strategy:

1. Is fully funded and resourced on an ongoing basis.
2. Has National Cabinet sign-off, to enable urgent, coordinated, and effective implementation of the Strategy.
3. Is guided by First Nations knowledge and leadership across all aspects of the Strategy through strong partnerships and co-design.
4. Builds healthy and climate resilient communities by mobilising sectors outside of the health system to address the wider determinants of health.

The National Health and Climate Strategy must ensure it does more than just reduce health sector emissions. It also needs to build stronger, healthier communities that are able to thrive in the face of climate change.

The joint statement comes as submissions on the Federal Government's Consultation Paper close.

The strategy is due to be finalised at the end of 2023.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

- Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP)
- The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP)
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR)
- Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators (RACMA)
- Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM)
- Australia and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA)
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG)
- Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD)
- College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand (CICM)

We are a broad group representing more than 100,000 doctors across 12 medical Colleges. We have come together to advocate for climate action that protects health and strengthens health systems through our [Healthy Climate Future](#) campaign.

Quotes attributable to RACP President, Dr Jacqueline Small

"A Strategy that reduces emissions is a positive – but we need the Strategy to also help us save lives when an inevitable climate event occurs which could be next week, next month, or next year. This is urgent.

“Local communities need to know that if a climate event occurs, they are going to be able to access healthcare in a timely and effective way.

Quote attributable to RACS President, Associate Professor Kerin Fielding

“Due to being one of the most resource-intensive areas of the hospital, strategies which target the operating theatre can have some of the biggest impacts on healthcare greenhouse emissions reductions within the health-care industry. RACS is committed to working with the Government and the new Sustainable Healthcare Unit to implement initiatives which reduce the impact that surgical practice has on the environment, while also ensuring patient safety or quality of care is not compromised.”

Quote attributable to Chair, RACGP Climate and Environmental Medicine Specific Interest group, Dr Kate Wylie

“GPs across Australia and the world are seeing the health impacts of climate change every day. It is a health emergency, and our elected leaders need to act urgently. The National Climate and Health Strategy will only work if it’s fully funded and implemented effectively, and if there is appropriate government support for GP practices to implement any changes required.”

Quote attributable to RANZCP President, Dr Elizabeth Moore

“Natural disasters and extreme weather events can have a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of the community. As well as providing immediate support, we need think about how mental health care is included in long-term disaster planning.”

Quote attributable to RANZCR President, Clinical Associate Professor Sanjay Jeganathan

“Health can play a practical part in mitigating the effects of climate change and decreasing the carbon footprint by providing high value health care. The National Health and Climate Strategy is an opportunity to meaningfully address those issues affecting communities to build resilience in communities most likely to be affected as well as to build capability and resilience in their health networks.”

Quote attributable to RACMA President, Dr Helen Parsons CSC FRACMA

“The Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators (RACMA) believes that no action is inaction in the face of the current climate crisis. It is critical we advocate to government and the community for a health system, practices and research that deliver healthcare and services to the community which have minimal impact on the climate. As leaders we must ensure all system decisions are made with consideration of the effects on the climate, and therefore the health and future of the people we care for. This includes system and building design, carbon offsetting and work practices that may reduce our impact on our environment, including the reduction of medical waste, and choosing value-based sustainable practices.”

Quote attributable to ACRRM President, Dr Dan Halliday

“As a Rural Generalist, farmer and community member, I am well aware of the impacts of climate on the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of rural and remote Australians. As a trainer of the next generation of rural doctors, ACRRM supports the development of a National Health and Climate Strategy as part of our commitment to developing policy and educating and supporting its members on practical ways they can make a positive individual contribution as well as leading and supporting their communities to do so.”

Quote attributable to emergency physician and ACEM member Dr Lai-Heng Foong

“As an emergency physician, I know an emergency when I see one, and climate change is the biggest global threat to emergency departments, health systems and public health. As leaders, we need you to act now to reduce the health impacts of a preventable disaster caused by a changing climate that has already reached tipping points.”

Quote attributable to former Chair of the ANZCA Environmental Sustainability Network, Dr Scott Ma

"With healthcare contributing to a significant proportion of emissions, we are ready to work with government to not only mitigate the impact, but also prepare health services to adapt to the already changing climate and its effect on the health and wellbeing of the communities we serve."

Quote attributable to Chair of the RANZCOG Environmental Sustainability Working Group, Dr Kristine Barnden

"The choices we make today will lock in health outcomes for generations to come. Children have the right to be born into a safe environment with a stable climate."

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