



Australian Medical Association (WA)

***Climate Health WA Inquiry***



## **AMA Position Statement on Climate Change & Human Health**

The Australian Medical Association recognises climate change as a health emergency and in September 2019, produced a Federal Council motion that reads:

*“The Federal Council recognises climate change as a health emergency, with clear scientific evidence indicating severe impacts for our patients and communities now and into the future. The AMA commits to working with government agencies and other organisations to prioritise actions in line with the AMA’s 2015 Position Statement on Climate Change and Human Health.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Medical Association, Media Release, “AMA formally recognises climate change as a health emergency”, Date Published: 03 September 2019, <<https://ama.com.au/media/climate-change-health-emergency>>

The Australian Medical Association (WA) supports the position outlined in Federal Council motion and the *AMA's Position Statement on Climate Change and Human Health*,<sup>2</sup> noting that WA faces a number of unique challenges in relation to the impact of climate change on health.

Western Australia cannot therefore rely on a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to the issue, or depend on interstate, Commonwealth or international actors to consider the impact that climate change is having on the health of Western Australians.

The health system can lead research and assist in designing required mitigation activities that will address the issues presented by WA's specific geography and population demographics, some of which are particularly vulnerable in different ways to the impact of climate change.

Western Australia:

- accounts for 33 percent of Australia's total land mass;
- has diverse climate zones, all with population centres and economic activity that may be impacted by climate change; and
- has a large rural population, with 16 per cent of West Australians living in regional areas and six per cent living in remote or very remote areas, who are more vulnerable to the impact of climate change.<sup>3</sup>

The AMA (WA) notes that climate change continues to be a contentious issue for society, with diverse opinions on its impact and how society should address it. There are number of strategies that will support assessing and mitigating any impact climate change could have on the health of West Australians:

- Facilitating collaboration, clinical research and analysis of the interaction between climate and human health.
- Supporting the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians to consider how climate change and its health impacts should feature in medical training and specialist practice.
- Reporting on emissions and consumable management to drive efficiencies in WA's public hospital system and identifying parties responsible for managing impact.

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Medical Association, Position Statement, "Climate Change and Human Health", Date Revised: 28 August 2015, <<https://ama.com.au/position-statement/ama-position-statement-climate-change-and-human-health-2004-revised-2015>>

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 3218.0 Regional Population Growth, Estimated Resident Population, Remoteness Areas, Australia, Released: 24 April 2018

## Facilitating collaboration, clinical research and analysis of the interaction between climate and human health

The AMA (WA) believes that the WA Health should lead a whole-of-government approach towards addressing climate change and its impact on human health. WA Health has a legal obligation<sup>4</sup> to:

- promote and protect the health status of Western Australians;
- identify and respond to opportunities to reduce inequities in health status; and
- promote innovation in the provision of health service and teaching, training and research.

In accordance with the aforementioned legal obligations, the WA Health should facilitate and support a scientific, evidence-based approach towards assessing and tackling the health impacts of climate change. Data collection, data linkage and clinical research are critical to ensuring an appropriate, coordinated government response to policy development and political activities. In this regard, the WA health system must also support WA's clinical workforce and medical institutions to manage and respond to the health issues associated with climate change.

Particularly in the context of climate change and health, collaboration between medical research institutions, academic institutions, the health system, general practice and other scientific organisations who play a role in collecting and analysing data relating to the impact of climate change is important. Supporting partnerships between disparate institutions and enabling access to appropriate funding that facilitates collaboration is a challenge that WA has yet to overcome.

The WA health system and WA Government should explore appropriate funding mechanisms to ensure adequate resources to enable clinical research and activity.

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<sup>4</sup> Health Services Act 2016 (WA), s.4

## **Consider how climate change and its health impacts should feature in medical training and specialist practice**

The AMA (WA) supports the development of clinical knowledge and understanding of the health impacts of climate change and system evaluation as to how medical training and clinical practice connects with this issue.

The AMA (WA) suggests that the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians could assist in assessing whether and how climate change and its health impacts could be included in the medical curriculum. In this regard, reviewing clinical training pathways and professional development, presents an opportunity to encourage, develop and embed an understanding of the health impacts of climate change into specialist medical training and practice.

Providing formal teaching and exposure to medical students and embedding education regarding climate change and its impact on health, could help foster a future clinical commitment to knowledge development in this area. Medical students have noted a lack of access to informal research networks and a limited understanding of the breadth of research opportunities available to them and this is a missed opportunity to encourage an early understanding of and commitment to medical research.

In addition to supporting medical students, medical training pathways and professional development, there must be renewed focus on clinical academia in WA. The AMA (WA) notes the importance of collaboration between academic institutions, research organisations, industry and health system stakeholders to encourage careers in medical research and developing our understanding of the interaction between climate and health outcomes.

## **Reporting on emissions and consumable management to drive efficiencies in WA's public hospital system and identifying parties responsible for managing impact**

WA Health delivers care in more than 80 hospitals, employing over 40,000 staff and managing more than a million patients every year. While acknowledging that the delivery of health care must not be compromised, the AMA (WA) is supportive of the WA Health introducing system oversight to better understand, monitor and mitigate the impact that the WA Health has on the environment.

The AMA (WA) has been unable to access readily available data relating to emissions and waste produced by WA's public hospital system. Appropriate and cost effective waste, energy and consumable management can only be implemented if WA health system stakeholders have access to the data that enables them to take action to mitigate their impact on the environment. In order for this to be effectively implemented, the AMA (WA) suggests that responsible parties within the health system, such as WA Health Service Provider Boards, are made responsible for monitoring and where possible reducing, the impact of their hospitals and health services on the environment.

The AMA (WA) also notes that new health infrastructure projects and outsourcing public services to private providers offers the WA Government an opportunity to include waste, energy and consumable reporting and KPIs in service and procurement contracts.



## Implementation

Any recommendations stemming from the Climate Health Inquiry WA, must be coupled by a detailed implementation plan. As part of the Climate Health Inquiry's final report, the AMA (WA) recommends identifying the parties responsible for funding and implementation of recommendations and required action, in addition to implementation timelines where appropriate.