



CLIMATE^{AND}
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

Submission to Federal Budget
Recommendations for a health-led
economic recovery to the COVID-19
pandemic

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Contact

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About the Climate and Health Alliance

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is a national charity and the peak body on climate change and health in Australia. CAHA is an alliance of organisations within the health sector working together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions.

The membership of CAHA includes a broad cross-section of health sector stakeholders with 80+ member organisations, representing healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as healthcare service providers, institutions, academics, researchers, and consumers.

The Climate and Health Alliance has produced a significant number of reports and publications to assist policymakers and inform health stakeholders and the wider community to understand the links between climate change and health, and to guide decisions regarding policy and solutions. These include the Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia; Human Health and Wellbeing Adaptation Plan for Queensland; a Review of Climate Change and Australia's Healthcare Systems for the Royal Australasian College of Physicians; a communication guide and national survey of healthcare professionals on climate change and health; and more.

CAHA also supports Australian and New Zealand health services and organisations to reduce their ecological and carbon footprint and promote public and environmental health via the Global Green and Healthy Hospital Network. The Alliance also contributes to many conferences, community dialogues, and forums, both nationally and internationally on these issues.

For more information about the membership and governance of the Climate and Health Alliance, see www.caha.org.au

Introduction

COVID-19 has shaken Australia's society and economy. The Commonwealth Government has had to put in place unprecedented measures to protect its citizens and minimise fall-out. However, the ongoing public health crisis, along with measures put in place by federal and state governments to contain the virus, has led to a widespread economic downturn, weakened by a lack of coordination and coherent public health messaging across governments.

Despite being able to keep the pandemic largely at bay in 2020 and 2021, the emergence of the Omicron-variant in Australia in November 2021 has meant a further escalation of the impact of COVID-19. The effects of the current crisis will likely be felt throughout 2022. Australia's society and economy will remain affected by the impacts for COVID-19 for many years to come.

Australia's response however, by its government and people, has shown the potential for drastic change and swift reactions for the common good. As we now look to rebuild our economy, we must make use of the opportunity to re-shape our society for a sustainable, resilient and healthy future. Our ongoing failure to prepare for and respond to climate change puts the health of the population at further risk. We can take protective action that will help secure the health and wellbeing of the population, but we must invest in coordinated systems, programs and initiatives to achieve this.

COVID-19 has also highlighted the links between environmental and human health. Environmental degradation, in particular land-clearing, has been linked to the rise of zoonotic diseases, such as COVID-19. Rising temperatures further accelerate the rise of infectious diseases. To avoid further public health crises from health and environmental disasters, federal and state governments must strengthen and integrate public health and climate preparedness. Doing so will also safeguard a long-term economic recovery, and position Australia to benefit from the transition to net zero emissions.

CAHA has put forward policy recommendations that recognise health, environment and climate links. Our Healthy, Regenerative and Just framework for a national strategy on climate, health and wellbeing for Australia, endorsed by 60+ health organisations, provides a comprehensive roadmap to support the Commonwealth Government in taking a leadership role in protecting the health and well-being of Australian communities from climate change and in fulfilling its international obligations, including under the Paris Agreement.

By investing in measures that meet these criteria, the federal government will be able to simulate a fast recovery with fiscal and health co-benefits. These measures set the path for long-term resilience, economic security, environmental protection, and the flourishing of all people in Australia in safe, resilient and vibrant communities.

We call on the government to fund measures under these following key areas to contribute to a healthy, regenerative, and just society and economy:

Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being

CAHA's Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being outlines a comprehensive set of integrated climate and health measures that will deliver cost-savings and health co-benefits.

In this section, we outline concrete investment measures under eight key areas of policy action.

Leadership, Financing and Governance

Providing leadership and establishing appropriate governance and financing arrangements in order to effectively respond to climate change and health risks at national, state/territory, and local levels, and contributing to the international effort to limit global warming.

Recommendations:

- **Develop and implement a national strategy on climate, health and well-being for Australia**, drawing on the framework developed by the health sector;
- **Conduct a national climate and health consultation** to inform this national strategy; and
- **Establish a National Health and Climate Change Committee, and an AHPPC subcommittee on climate and health**. The establishment of an Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) subcommittee on climate and health and a National Committee (or similar construct) of Health and Climate Change (or related portfolios) Ministers should provide oversight of the development and implementation of the national strategy

The costs required for the establishment and coordination of an AHPPC subcommittee are estimated (for staffing and operational budget) as \$300,000 p.a. A national consultation and development of national strategy is estimated to cost \$2 million.

Emergency and Disaster-preparedness

Supporting the identification of vulnerable populations and gaps in policies and procedures, including in emergency services, in order to adequately prepare for the impacts of climate change.

Recommendations:

- **Finance community preparedness and disaster recovery.** Operationalise the emergency response fund (ERF) to ensure communities are resilient and recover quickly from disasters. Invest in prevention and early intervention to prevent the worst impacts of disasters.
- **Invest in vulnerability and risk assessment** of populations and healthcare and emergency services. Support all healthcare systems to undertake vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCAs), including in rural and remote communities.
- **Embed VCAs within healthcare system management, accreditation standards and performance measures.**

The ERF allows the Government to draw up to \$200 million in any given year, beyond what is already available to fund emergency response and natural disaster recovery and preparedness. The ERF has not been utilised by the Government thus far, despite generating \$751 million in interest in 2021 alone. An investment of \$200 million p.a. in disaster preparedness and recovery would secure the long-term resilience of the Australian economy, and save money in the medium to long term.

Education, Communication and Capacity Building

Educating and raising awareness of the health impacts of climate change within the health workforce, and the wider Australian community.

Recommendations:

- **Support a public education campaign on the health impacts of climate change.** Such a campaign would improve public and policy literacy on the well-established evidence of the health impacts of climate change, and play an

important part in ensuring consistent public health messaging around the impacts of climate change, as well as in changing Australian attitudes and behaviors.

- **Equip health professionals with information, training and resources to respond to the next health disaster.** Integrate education about climate change and health into all health professional training degrees and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Develop a national grant program to support the delivery of CPD training on environmental health and climate change, accessible to CPD providers across health disciplines.
- **Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and leadership in all climate health policy and action.** Including by implementing the recommendations from the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

We estimate that a national education campaign on the health impacts of climate change would require around \$500,000 p.a. for four years to become effective. We estimate a national grant program for CPD training on environmental health and climate change to require \$3 million p.a.

A Sustainable and Resilient Health Care Sector

A sustainable, resilient health sector which can effectively respond to the health impacts of disasters.

Recommendations:

- **Establish a Sustainable Development Unit in the Commonwealth Department of Health.** The SDU would be tasked with the development of a sustainability roadmap for the health sector. This would include a detailed evaluation of national healthcare emissions, and the development of an annual carbon budget for the health sector as a mechanism to ensure measurable progress towards achieving net zero emissions by 2040. It is proposed that the SDU performs this function ie developing the roadmap and carbon budgets and reporting annually on health sector emissions.
- **Coordinate a national healthcare response with states and territories.** We propose the Commonwealth works with the states and territories to develop a roadmap for the health sector to reach net zero emissions by 2035. Such a plan should encompass 5-yearly goals and be informed by research, evidence and case studies, including from the National Health Service (NHS) in England, the World Health Organization (WHO) and lessons from the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals network, and the Healthcare Decarbonisation Roadmap developed by the international organisation Health Care Without Harm.

The cost of the establishment of a national SDU (for staffing and operational budget) is estimated at \$1,000,000 p.a. The estimated cost for the development of the healthcare sustainability roadmap is an initial one-off cost of \$300,000; with biennial reviews and adjustments costing \$100,000. We estimate an initial investment of \$5 million in sustainable health care is needed to support implementation of the roadmap.

Research and Data for a Health-led Recovery

Supporting Australia's health and climate research capacity to evaluate specific health threats, priority needs, to design responses and to monitor trends and opportunities for maximising multi-sector benefits.

Recommendations:

- **Establish a dedicated health resilience research fund to support innovation and evidence-based action.** Connect research and innovation efforts through communities of practice that share knowledge and translate effective strategies at scale. Direct research funding to (i) vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCAs) to manage risks to human health including from extreme weather events; (ii) evaluation of sustainable health interventions; and (iii) implementation of research and translation of evidence-based interventions into policy and practice.
- **Harness the expertise of the Australian research community.** Build on the Healthy Environments And Lives (HEAL) network, and its work to develop a national risk assessment of current and future health burdens driven by environmental change in Australia (NHMRC funding), by ensuring an ongoing funding source for policy development and Implementation of solutions.

The initial funding of the HEAL network of \$10 million in Federal Government funding could be expanded to another \$10 million for a second stage of the network, allowing for policy development and implementation. A separate \$5 million in Federal funding could ensure the development of a dedicated health resilience research fund.

Health-Promotion and Prevention

Policies that protect and promote health and wellbeing while simultaneously reducing environmental health risks.

Recommendations:

- **Deliver a health-led recovery from COVID-19.** This requires government policy and regulation, as well as private sector action, to shift finance and investment towards initiatives that build resilience from shocks and stresses, strengthen the economy, and promote health. In all policy efforts, a health lens should be applied i.e. a "Health in All Policies" approach that evaluates potential for health benefits and health harms.
- The Health in All Policies approach should be adopted in all health-determining sectors: energy, transport, agriculture, buildings and urban development.

Supporting Healthy and Resilient Communities

Enhancing the capacities of communities to anticipate their climate risks and reduce impacts on health and wellbeing in their communities.

- **Strengthen community resilience.** Empower communities and community service organisations to respond and build resilience to health threats. We propose a Community Climate Resilience Fund to support geographic communities and communities of practice around Australia to prepare for, and respond to extreme weather events and other climate-related risks that pose a threat to public health.

We propose a Community Climate Resilience Fund is created by allocating 60% of the budget of the existing emergency response fund (ERF) to community resilience, amounting to \$120 million pa.

Thriving Ecosystems

Restoring and safeguarding Australia's ecosystems, recognising that intact ecosystems are the fundamental basis of human health and livelihoods.

- **Expand programs to preserve natural environments.** Despite significant federal funding going to ecosystems preservation and restoration, Australia remains one of the world's hotspots for deforestation and species extinction. To reverse this trend, additional and targeted efforts are needed. This includes programs that (i) halt further deforestation, (ii) enable First Nations Peoples to take the lead in preserving and restoring the natural environments that they live and work in, (iii) expand land restoration, including the revegetation of forests, rivers and wetlands, and biodiversity conservation, prioritising bushfire and drought-affected regions, as well as metropolitan, suburban, peri-urban and rural areas and (iv) improve agro-ecological practices and sustainable agriculture.

- **Enable First Nations Peoples to take the lead in preserving and restoring the natural environment.** Expand initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to implement traditional approaches to environmental management and biodiversity conservation, and support local communities to care for country.

The Government is currently investing \$100 million through the Environment Restoration Fund and \$1 billion through the National Landcare Program, up until 2023. Additional grants are also available to support the implementation of the new Threatened Species Strategy's Action Plan, to improve the trajectories of 100 priority species.

*CAHA estimates that **additional** targeted funding of \$100 million would have to be allocated in 2022-2023 in order to reverse the continuing trend of deforestation and species extinction in Australia.*

Appendix A: Climate and Health Alliance Members (as at December 2021)

Abilita

Arriba Group

Asthma Australia

Australasian College of Health Service Management (ACHSM)

Australasian College of Nutritional and Environmental Medicine (ACNEM)

Australasian Epidemiological Association (AEA)

Australasian Society of Lifestyle Medicine (ASLM)

Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG)

Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)

Australian Chiropractors Association

Australian College of Nursing (ACN)

Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)

Australian Federation of Medical Women (AFMW)

Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA)

Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA)

Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA)

Australian Institute of Health Innovation (AIHI)

Australian Lesbian Medical Association (ALMA)

Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA)

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF)

Australian Physiotherapy Association

Australian Podiatry Association (APodA)

Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA)

Australian Psychological Society (APS)

Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN)

Brooke Shelton - Perinatal, Child & Family Counselling

Cairns Hand Clinic

Central Australia Rural Practitioners Association (CARPA)

Children's Healthcare Australasia

Climatewise Design

Codesain

CoHealth

ConNetica Consulting

Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF)

Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation

CRANaplus

Cultivate Impact

Dietitians Australia

Doctors for Nutrition

Doctors Reform Society (DRS)
Enliven Victoria
Enriching Lives Psychology
Environmental Health Australia
Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney
Food for Thought Consulting Australia
Friends of CAHA
Health Care Consumers' Association ACT
Health Consumers NSW
Health Issues Centre (HIC)
Health Nature Sustainability Research Group (HNSRG)
Health Services Union (HSU)
Healthy Futures
Indigenous Allied Health Australia
Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP)
Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney
Kooweerup Regional Health Service (KRHS)
Lowitja Institute
Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAWP) Australia
Medical Scientists Association of Victoria (MSAV)
Metta Health & Psychology
MinterEllison
Motion Energy Group
National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners (NAATSIHWP)
Naturopaths and Herbalists Association of Australia (NHAA)
NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA)
Optometry Australia
Pharmacists for the Environment Australia (PEA)
Psychology for a Safe Climate (PSC)
Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA)
Queensland Nurses and Midwives Union (QNMU)
Royal Australasian College of Physicians
Rural Doctors Association of Victoria (RDAV)
SANE Australia
School of Public Health, University of Sydney
School of Public Health & Social Work, Queensland University of Technology
Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH)
Veterinarians for Climate Action (VFCA)
Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA)

Vote Earth Now
Weenthunga Health Network
Women's Health East (WHE)
Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE)
Women's Health in the North (WHIN)
Women's Healthcare Australasia