



CLIMATE AND
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Prime Minister must tackle climate change with same urgency as COVID-19: Open Letter from health groups

A coalition of 29 leading health groups today have written to the Prime Minister calling for “the same level of urgency in tackling climate change” as the COVID-19 pandemic and for the Prime Minister to commit to a national climate change response with health and well-being at its core.

The groups include Climate and Health Alliance (representing over 45 organisations), Public Health Association of Australia and Australian Epidemiological Association.

The health groups warn that: “climate change is accelerating, and if our current trajectory continues unchecked, we face existential threats to humanity.”

As global temperatures rise, extreme weather events, like bushfires and cyclones, will become more frequent and more severe, “putting the lives, health and well-being of the entire population at risk.”

Climate change also risks disrupting the healthcare supply chain and damaging health infrastructure, and worsening the conditions that led to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“To avoid further health and environmental disasters, governments must take heed of the science, listen to health experts and act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect the natural environment,” the groups say.

Climate and Health Alliance Executive Director Fiona Armstrong said: “There is a hugely important opportunity for public investment to stimulate the economy, create jobs and support recovery post COVID-19. This is our moment to invest in a healthier, regenerative and just future.

“Yet the recent Federal Budget missed this moment, instead allocating hundreds of millions of dollars in public money to support a ‘gas-led recovery’ and other fossil fuels.

“There can be no ‘recovery’ with gas. The latest evidence suggests gas is just as emissions-intensive as coal. Backing gas and fossil fuels will only accelerate the climate health emergency, further putting at risk the health of all Australians.”

Public Health Association of Australia CEO Terry Slevin said: “The impacts of COVID-19 have been severe and wide-reaching; and yet climate change is something which poses just as significant, if not a greater, challenge in terms of the impacts on human health, societies and economies.

“We are already witnessing the public health impacts of climate change; through bushfires and smoke, through heatwaves, through communities devastated by drought – the list will only grow with further inaction as Australia is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

“One positive of COVID is that it has revealed an opportunity to rebuild society in a way that is healthier for people and the planet, placing equity and sustainability at the core. This requires a commitment by governments to move away from ineffective approaches such as a gas-led recovery, and adopt an evidence-based strategy to mitigate and prevent further disastrous effects of climate change.”

The groups collectively thanked the Prime Minister and elected representatives for their leadership acting on the COVID-19 pandemic, and noted that, because of this, Australia has fared much better than many countries.

Accompanying the letter, the group released the [‘Healthy, Regenerative and Just: Our vision for a better future’](#), which lays out a policy roadmap for governments to act on climate change to protect health.

Health professionals and groups are becoming increasingly vocal on the health emergency of climate change. This letter follows a number of prominent health groups declaring a climate health emergency, including the Australian Medical Association, and [a push by health groups earlier this year for the government’s National Preventive Health Strategy to address climate change](#).

Resources

Media contact

To organise an interview with a local health spokesperson, contact Adam Pulford on 0424 885 387.

29 signatories

Abilita
Australasian Society of Lifestyle Medicine
Australian Association of Social Workers
Australian College of Nursing
Australian Epidemiological Association
Australian Health Promotion Association
Australian Healthcare & Hospitals Association
Australian Institute of Health Innovation, Macquarie University
Australian Medical Students' Association
Australian Nursing & Midwifery Foundation
Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association
Children's Healthcare Australasia
Climate & Health Alliance
Codesain
cohealth
ConNetica Consulting
Consumers Health Forum of Australia
Dietitians Australia
Doctors for Nutrition
Doctors Reform Society
Health Nature and Sustainability Research Group, Deakin University
Northern Health
ProVeritas Group
Psychology for a Safe Climate
Public Health Association of Australia
Queensland University of Technology
Social Workers for Climate Action
Veterinarians for Climate Action
Women's Healthcare Australasia