

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



AMA FORMALLY RECOGNISES CLIMATE CHANGE AS A HEALTH EMERGENCY

The AMA has joined other health organisations around the world – including the American Medical Association, the British Medical Association, and Doctors for the Environment Australia – in recognising climate change as a health emergency.

At its August meeting in Canberra, the AMA Federal Council declared that climate change is real and will have the earliest and most severe health consequences on vulnerable populations around the world, including in Australia and the Pacific region.

The Federal Council Motion 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](#).

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the evidence is in on climate change - and it is irrefutable.

“The AMA accepts the scientific evidence on climate change and its impact on human health and human wellbeing,” Dr Bartone said.

“The scientific reality is that climate change affects health and wellbeing by increasing the environment and situations in which infectious diseases can be transmitted, and through more extreme weather events, particularly heatwaves.

“Climate change will cause higher mortality and morbidity from heat stress.

“Climate change will cause injury and mortality from increasingly severe weather events.

“Climate change will cause increases in the transmission of vector-borne diseases.

“Climate change will cause food insecurity resulting from declines in agricultural outputs.

“Climate change will cause a higher incidence of mental ill-health.

“These effects are already being observed internationally and in Australia. There is no doubt that climate change is a health emergency.

“The AMA is proud to join the international and local chorus of voices urging action to address climate change on health grounds,” Dr Bartone said.

The AMA is calling on the Australian Government to:

- Adopt mitigation targets within an Australian carbon budget.
- Promote the health benefits of addressing climate change.
- Develop a National Strategy for Health and Climate Change.

- Promote an active transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.
- Establish a National Sustainable Development Unit to reduce carbon emissions in the healthcare sector.

Background

- The significant health impacts of climate change have been evident for some time. The AMA has held a position on climate change and health since 2004.
- In 2015, the World Health Organisation [rated climate change](#) as “the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century.”
- The [Lancet Countdown on health and climate change’s 2018 report](#) and the [Australia-specific report](#) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s [1.5 degrees report](#) all outline the serious health effects of climate change, internationally and in Australia.

Australia-specific effects include:

- Significant linear associations between exposure to higher temperatures and greater mortality in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane.
- Estimated annual productivity losses from heat stress of \$616 per employed person in Australia.
- 2177 deaths from extreme weather events in Australia between 1900 and 2017.
- An observed 13.7 per cent increase in the ability of *Aedes aegypti* (dengue-carrying mosquito) to transmit disease to humans in Australia from 1950-2016.

In April 2019, a group of Australian health and medical associations, including Doctors for the Environment, the Climate and Health Alliance, the Royal Australian College of Physicians, and the Australian Medical Students’ Association wrote an [open letter](#) to all political parties emphasising the “significant and profound impacts climate change has on the health of people and our health system.”

In June 2019, a group of 70 American health organisations, including the American Medical Association and the American College of Physicians, recognised climate change as a health emergency, releasing a [call to action](#) on climate, health, and equity.

In July 2019, the British Medical Association declared a climate emergency and committed to campaign for carbon neutrality by 2030.

The AMA *Position Statement on Climate Change and Human Health* is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/ama-position-statement-climate-change-and-human-health-2004-revised-2015>

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CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
 Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753