



Draft Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023

Response by

Australian Podiatry Association (APodA)

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About Us

The Australian Podiatry Association (APodA) is the largest and oldest peak body representing podiatry, with a profound role in promoting foot health and mobility, which is integral to addressing climate change and ensuring a sustainable present and future. We believe feet play a crucial role in the broader context of climate change and a healthy society.

The APodA is the only organisation in Australia that advocates exclusively for the interests of podiatrists and podiatry patients. It draws on the expertise of its members working across many fields to ensure our advocacy is based on the best available evidence. It is grounded in the experiences of contemporary Australian podiatry practice.

Members play a central role in the APodA's advocacy activities, and we could only achieve the influence and recognition we have with their expertise, skills, and dedication. The importance of podiatry goes beyond individual careers—it extends to the health of our planet and the well-being of its inhabitants.

The positive impact of podiatric care reaches beyond the clinic. It transforms the lives of one in five Australians who experience pain, mobility issues, or personal hygiene concerns affecting their foot health. Providing care and support that encourages mobility and movement contributes to a healthier and more sustainable present and future.

The APodA recognises that foot health and mobility are fundamental elements in addressing climate change and ensuring a sustainable society. We are committed to advancing podiatry to improve the well-being of individuals and, by extension, our planet. We can take steps towards a healthier and more environmentally responsible future.

Our Vision

To lead and influence the profession of Podiatry, to develop our members and improve patient outcomes.

Our Values

- Collaboration
- Leadership
- Connection
- Integrity

Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023: Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to strengthen the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023, ensuring it effectively achieves its goals. These recommendations promote responsible decision-making, equity, transparency, and adaptability in addressing the challenges of climate change and its impact on both current and future generations.

1. Establish Clear Reporting Mechanisms:

Ensure that the Bill includes provisions for regular reporting on the progress made in implementing the Framework's principles and objectives. This reporting should be publicly accessible and include assessments of its impact on health outcomes for current and future generations.

2. Incorporate Indigenous Voice:

Incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into climate and health policies. This inclusive approach ensures that Indigenous communities play a central role in shaping strategies that harmonise with their traditional wisdom and values while addressing climate-related health impacts. Furthermore, this approach acknowledges the disproportionate vulnerability of Indigenous populations to climate change impacts.

3. Evaluate:

Establish a regular review process for the Bill and associated policies to ensure they remain relevant and effective in addressing the evolving challenges of climate change and health. Consider periodic updates to incorporate new scientific findings and best practices.

Preamble

The APodA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023 (will also be referred to as 'The Bill').

As a proud member of the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), APodA believes that working together in striving towards a standard national approach to sustainability in healthcare is essential in improving Australia's health system, addressing the current and future impacts of the burden of disease and enhancing person-focused care.

The world's biophysical and ecological systems are changing at a rate not seen before due to human pressures. These biophysical and ecological systems are vital to human health and existence. Rampant disruptions caused by climate change are shifting the goalposts in tackling health inequalities.

This Bill aims to enhance the Climate Change Act of 2022 by introducing a vital provision that mandates decision-makers to factor in the well-being of both present and future generations when making specific decisions likely to contribute to climate change.

This proposed amendment aligns with APodA's previous endorsements of the National Health and Climate Strategy. Our overarching goal is to improve population and individual health outcomes and quality of life for the current and future generations by implementing innovative policy approaches, legislation, and regulations.

APodA welcomes the Climate Change Amendment Bill 2023, recognising its potential to foster intergenerational equity and prioritise the health and well-being of all individuals, now and in the future. This amendment reflects our commitment to proactively address climate change and its impacts on the well-being of present and future generations through comprehensive and forward-thinking strategies.

The Role Feet Play in Climate Change and Population Health

Feet and mobility are critical in addressing individual and community responses to climate change. Climate change, driven primarily by the use of fossil fuels and the resulting increase in greenhouse gases, has far-reaching health implications (1). Rising temperatures, sea levels, and extreme weather events such as floods and droughts impose significant health risks, and unfortunately, these impacts are generally maldistributed (2).

Vulnerable populations, including the elderly, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions, are particularly affected. Moreover, countries categorised as developed economies and economies in transition near the equator face heightened vulnerability despite having lower carbon emissions from healthcare activities (3). These impacted nations often lack the needed resilience to address the increasing healthcare needs brought about by climate change (4).

Recognising the global health crisis posed by climate change, international agreements like the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the World Health Organization's Climate Change Action Plan have been established (2). Health care causes global environmental impacts that, depending on which indicator is considered, range between 1% and 5% of total global impacts and are more than 5% for some national impacts (5).

Feet, as essential tools for mobility, contribute to individual and community resilience in the face of climate change. By promoting sustainable practices, reducing carbon footprints, and advocating for environmental stewardship, healthcare professionals, including podiatrists, are integral to addressing this global challenge (1).

Accountability, Responsibility and Transparency: Recommendations in Focus

Establish Clear Reporting Mechanisms

The inclusion of clear reporting mechanisms within 'The Bill' is vital to support its overall objectives. By instigating regular reporting on the progress of implementing the Bill's principles and objectives, greater transparency is developed. This accountability fosters responsible decision-making amongst Policy makers, government agencies and stakeholders, as their actions will be publicly available for future review. This level of transparency not only builds trust but also encourages active engagement and support from the public, further strengthening the Bill's efficacy in achieving its overall intention.

Incorporate Indigenous Voice

The ingraining of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the 'The Bill' is imperative for advancing a level of responsible duty of care and intergenerational equity our country needs. Indigenous communities have a deep understanding of their environments, and their traditional practices are inherently sustainable. By incorporating their voices, 'The Bill' acknowledges the historical injustices and recognises the disproportionate impact of climate change on Indigenous populations. This inclusive approach ensures that policies are not only respectful of Indigenous wisdom and values but also benefit from their unique insights into sustainable practices. It is an essential step toward fostering a more equitable and responsible approach to addressing climate change's adverse effects on both Indigenous communities and the broader population.

Evaluate

The need for a regular review process for 'The Bill' is paramount to maintain its effectiveness in upholding the principles of duty of care and intergenerational climate equity. Climate change is a dynamic challenge, and the Bill must adapt to evolving circumstances. Regular evaluations at state, federal and international levels ensure accountability by holding policymakers responsible for the outcomes of their decisions. This ongoing responsibility to improve and adjust policies is vital to fulfilling 'The Bill's' duty of care to current and future generations. Furthermore, the evaluation process enhances transparency by making the progress and impact of the Bill accessible to the public, fostering trust and active engagement in the ongoing efforts to combat climate change and protect public health.

Conclusion

The Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023 is a positive step towards safeguarding the wellbeing of current and future generations in Australia. The three recommendations outlined in the bill - establishing clear reporting mechanisms, incorporating Indigenous voices, and rigorous evaluation - are vital in ensuring its ongoing sustainability, effectiveness and relevance.

As a member of the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), we recognise the significance of 'The Bill' in addressing climate change and its impact on population health. We also highlight the pivotal role healthcare practitioners, including podiatrists, play within this context.

The role podiatrists play within our healthcare system is unique, and our commitment to promoting and supporting the protection of the environment through initiatives like green podiatry is paramount⁽¹⁾.

We encourage our planetary community to reduce their ecological footprint and foster healthier practices. In doing this we can all contribute to a sustainable future for both our patients now and into the future.

Passing the Climate Change Amendment Bill is not only a legislative necessity but also a moral obligation to ensure the health and wellbeing of generations to come. We support the bill and believe that, together with the efforts of healthcare professionals like podiatrists, we can pave the way for a healthier, more sustainable future for all Australians.

References

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