

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events

Question on notice to DEA:

“Before you go, can I just indicate that when there was a sense that the government had not done anything in the health area on climate change I went onto the department website and then Googled 'climate change' in the Department of Health and Ageing. There is a mass of work being done: funding seminars, concern for Aboriginal and Indigenous health and a whole range of things. Could you take on notice what the priority should be for the health department, given that they are doing a range of work that obviously some are not aware of? It would be nice to get feedback on that.”

Response:


The National Environmental Health Strategy 2007–2012 states the key environmental health risks in Australia to be addressed include emergencies and disasters and climate change.

[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/798726839F2B2FA6CA2572D40008D566/\\$File/enHealth%20NEHS%20final%20for%20web%20Nov%202007.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/798726839F2B2FA6CA2572D40008D566/$File/enHealth%20NEHS%20final%20for%20web%20Nov%202007.pdf)

Objectives to be achieved within this plan included

- *Ensure responses to climate change/heat-based heatwave procedures and thresholds effectively protect human health.*
- *Develop advice on interventions for vulnerable groups, e.g. aged care facilities, schools, childcare centres.*
- *Develop resources for local governments that will assist in adapting to, and mitigating, the human health impacts*
- *Provide guidance on climate change adaptation approaches for environmental health issues*
- *Develop resources for local governments that will assist in adapting to, and mitigating, the human health impacts of climate change.*

Despite some important progress in this area, largely due to state initiatives, these objectives have a long way yet to go to be achieved.

Almost 6 years ago, in April 2007, COAG agreed to the  [National Climate Change Adaptation Framework](#). This included a National Action Plan on Climate Change and Health.

“The Australian Health Ministers’ Conference will develop and implement a National Action Plan on Climate Change and Health that includes:

- research on climate change impacts on physical and mental health and identify key vulnerabilities;***
- identifying the capacity of the public health system and hospital system to plan for and respond to these vulnerabilities including links to emergency services and health disaster management policies;***
- incorporating the potential for climate change impacts on health into community and public health education programs”.***

This plan has yet to be fully realised.

The National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF) was funded to undertake research in this area and has begun this process, producing a National Climate Change Adaptation Research Plan for Human Health.

http://www.nccarf.edu.au/sites/default/files/attached_files_publications/NCCARF%20health%20brochure_S.pdf

Yet despite ever increasing warnings of the importance of this issue

http://climatecommission.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/111129_FINAL-FOR-WEB.pdf, funding for climate change adaptation research is to be discontinued this year.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-26/key-climate-change-body-running-out-of-money/4539948>

<http://theconversation.edu.au/who-will-speak-up-for-climate-change-adaptation-12627>

This surely sends contradictory messages to the public when the government says it is serious about climate change on the one hand but considers climate change research an optional extra.

A good first step would to be an evaluation of progress achieved since the COAG decision for a National Action Plan on Climate Change and Health, which would likely quickly reveal inadequacies in progress. Adequate resources should be committed to climate change and health research and policy and this topic should be made a priority for the Department of Health and Aging.



The following are members of our Scientific Committee and support the work of
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