

As a future doctor and health researcher, I would like to draw the Treaties Commission's attention to the urgent nature of action on climate change in order to protect the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

“Tackling climate change could be the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st Century.” – *The Lancet* (2015)

In signing the 2015 Paris agreement of the UNFCCC, Australia committed to limit global average temperature to less than 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures while pursuing efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C and increase the ability to adapt to a 2°C warmer world. Importantly, the Paris Agreement also obliges nations consider the “right to health” in the context of their climate change response and to recognise the value of health co-benefits in mitigation actions.

There is strong empirical evidence indicating that climate change poses significant immediate and long-term risks to the health of Australians.

Australians face serious and increasing climate change related health risks, including heat-related illnesses and deaths, outbreaks of infectious diseases, impacts from food and water insecurity, occupational health impacts, mental illness and stress associated with environmental damage and concern about climate change, and increased risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases [1-5].

Climate mitigation policies can result in substantial health co-benefits, which can lead to considerable health cost savings for the health sector.

There is a substantial body of academic work highlighting the potential for health ‘co-benefits’, such as avoided ill-health and productivity gains, associated with strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, specifically in the sectors of household energy, food and agriculture, transportation and electricity generation[6]

Human health and the health sector have been afforded little consideration in the development of national climate change mitigation policies.

This is despite a substantial body of evidence showing that ambitious national climate change mitigation policies can have several co-benefits for human health, and the obligations under the Paris Agreement to apply a “health lens” to climate policies[4, 7].

Greater ambition is required by the Federal Government to build resilience and ensure adaptation is adequate to safeguard Australia against the real and present dangers of climate change.

The current national emissions reduction target of 5 per cent below 2000 levels by 2020 is incompatible with limiting climate change to 2 degrees of warming[8]. Current adaptation policy acknowledges some of the health risks of climate change, but provides little detail on the specific actions that the Federal Government has taken, or will take, to manage the health impacts of climate change[9].

I am of the firm belief that in order to protect Australians and our global neighbour from the health impacts of climate change, it is imperative that we implement a national strategy for climate, health and wellbeing. The national strategy would enable Australia to adequately respond to the risks to health from climate change, and promote education and awareness about climate change and health among the health professions and the wider community, so both can be better prepared. It would strengthen climate and health research to identify population groups and communities particularly vulnerable to health risks from climate change and develop strategies to reduce those risks, while investing in research to quantify the health benefits of different emissions-reduction scenarios to guide climate policy choices.

It doesn't take a crystal ball to see the effects of climate change on our communities. Patients are already making choices that are influenced by an increasingly hostile climate. We know that our health and wellbeing is

inextricably tied to that of the land on which we live. Fortunately, we have the technical and economic tools available to us to tackle the climate crisis [10] [6, 11] [10] [12] [13]. What we lack at present is the political will to harness the opportunities presented by a healthier, fairer, more sustainable society. A national strategy on climate, health and wellbeing would provide a prescription for a healthier future for all Australians.

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