

Climate Change & Health

Preamble

Human pressure on the natural environment is widening and escalating. The extra, more systemic environmental threat to human wellbeing, health and survival has become evident over the past two to three decades – threats from human-induced changes to stratospheric ozone, the climate system, soil fertility and food yields, freshwater supplies, the many ecosystems that maintain the function and vitality of Earth's life-support systems, and the more insidious, pervasive spread of persistent organic chemicals. Meanwhile, other more familiar and more localised hazards have re-emerged as major concerns, including the rising levels of extraction and combustion of fossil fuels especially coal-fired power plants and extraction of unconventional gas.

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA), seeks to raise awareness of both the general public and, in particular, parliamentarians of the risks to local and global human health – present and future – from environmentally damaging and disruptive technological choices and related short-term economic priorities.

DEA is focused on human-induced climate change, widely regarded as now the most serious and growing, worldwide threat to human health and survival and to social stability. This is a topic of utmost urgency, and of great political and cultural complexity. All doctors have an important responsibility to explain both ongoing and newly-emerging environmental risks to public health and to ensure that health services are equipped to handle those threats.

Position

DEA emphasises the nature and magnitude of the threat to human health and survival posed by climate change. DEA supports:

- rapid action to mitigate further climate change by reducing global CO₂ levels to 300ppm
- an urgent and just transition to renewable energy sources with a phase out of fossil fuels like coal and unconventional gas
- preservation of forests and other carbon-dense ecosystems to protect carbon sinks
- action to draw down CO₂ using biosequestration as with revegetation projects
- urban design that promotes use of public and active transport, goods transport by rail, renewable energy powered electric vehicles and low GHG international travel means
- promotion of the health co-benefits of action on climate change
- education of all medical and para-medical staff with training, institutional capacity, disaster preparedness, ancillary support services, and upgraded public health surveillance and risk-reduction programs

- efforts to stabilise global population including reproductive rights for all women
- dietary changes including a reduction in red meat consumption to decrease emissions from the agricultural sector and improve health
- all doctors to be educated about climate change and its health implications.

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