

# Federal Government leadership on the health consequences of climate change

To address climate change - the greatest global-health threat of the 21st century - national leadership and governance is needed, as for any other aspect of health delivery in Australia.

Action on climate change is accepted as a federal responsibility of the Department of the Environment and Energy and its Minister. At present, the Minister of Health and the Department of Health have little input or authority to address the risks and management of current and future health impacts arising from climate change.

This policy statement calls upon the federal government to accept responsibility for ensuring co-ordination and consistency of adaptation measures which impact upon health across the nation, with appropriate standards, research and funding to ensure compliance by state and territory authorities. This is essential to protect the community from the harmful health impacts of inevitable climate change, along with simultaneous efforts to develop and deliver robust climate change mitigation policies.

**The Australian government needs to effectively plan for and manage the inevitable health consequences of climate change**, just as it would for any other national health emergency

The case for this policy is detailed in the Discussion paper: *Federal Government action on health consequences of climate change*.

## Policy

Australia is not sufficiently prepared as a nation to manage the health and social consequences of accelerating climate change. We can learn from the approach and preparedness of other countries such as the UK and USA.

To ensure adequate planning and coordination for Australian adaptation to climate change, urgent reform of federal government approach is needed to protect Australian society from the expected harmful health impacts.

There are two pivotal actions needed to pave the way for this reform.

Firstly, the Prime Minister and his/her department should lead on the basis that climate change is not only an environmental and health issue, but also one of national and economic security and one which needs a whole of government approach.

Secondly, the Department of Health must be given responsibility for the development of a national strategy to coordinate an adequate response to the human health impacts of climate change. As the 'greatest health threat' of our time, the issue cannot be left solely to each State and Territory to implement.

We recommend

- 1. That the Prime Minister's department, through the Federal Department of Health, provide guidance and leadership for a national response to the human health impacts of climate change which can be delivered across each state and territory.**
- 2. Form a national expert task force to develop and implement a national strategy to prevent and manage the health impacts of climate change, taking account of initiatives at local and state levels.**

Consultation is required with states and territories and with other stakeholders such as primary health care providers, emergency services, researchers and relevant non-government organisations.

The strategy would strengthen and ensure implementation of the National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy and build upon specific actions for the prevention, preparedness and management of the health and social consequences of climate change.

## Summary

**Australia is poorly prepared for adequate adaptation to the health impacts of climate change and thus the community's health and our health services are vulnerable.**

**An immediate response at a federal level is needed, with sufficient resources and personnel, to deliver a coordinated national response to the human health impacts of climate change.**

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