

**Submission
to the
South Australian
Department for Health and Ageing**

South Australian Public Health Plan
South Australia: A Better Place to Live

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Submission from
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Introduction

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) is a voluntary organisation of medical doctors in all Australian states and territories. We work to address local, national and global health effects caused by damage to the earth's environment.

The medical profession has a proud record of service to the community. This record not only includes personal clinical care, but also involvement in global issues that threaten the future of humanity. We aim to use our scientific and medical skills to educate governments and industry, the public and our colleagues to highlight the medical importance of our natural environment. In effect we function as a public health organisation.

The Draft South Australian Public Health Plan

DEA commends the SA government for its comprehensive understanding of public health detailed in the Consultation Draft *South Australia: A Better Place to Live* (the Plan) and on developing recommendations that emphasise the prevention of illness and ill health.

The Plan is aspirational in its vision ("promoting and protecting our community's health and wellbeing") and is based on the Principles of the *SA Public Health Act 2011*, which are strongly supported by DEA: the precautionary principle; proportionate regulation principle; sustainability principle; principle of prevention; population focus principle; participation principle; partnership principle; and equity principle.

All of these Principles are of direct relevance to the role of local government in public health. In particular, participation and partnership with the State government will be essential to ensure that government policies and practices facilitate, and not inhibit, the implementation of the Plan at the local government level.

Preparing for Climate Change

The third of the four priorities in the draft Plan is "preparing for climate change" (pp 61-64). The draft Plan states that "[C]limate change represents one of the greatest global challenges" (p61).

In supporting this statement, Doctors for the Environment Australia agrees with the Lancet that “[C]limate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st Century”¹.

DEA supports the inclusion of this priority in the draft Plan and notes that action to address climate change is required at all levels: global, national, state, regional, community and individual. It is also clear that all four priorities are synergistic in promoting public health. Preparation for climate change will require actions in response to the other three priorities.

In 2011 DEA provided a Submission to the Draft Climate Change Adaptation Framework for South Australia *Prospering in a Changing Climate* (http://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/DEA_response_SA_adaptation.pdf).

This Submission noted that the Framework document

“... does not also deal with mitigation, given that this is a fundamental task, particularly considering the longer we wait, the more economically costly and impossible it will become ... Considering the medical approach of ‘prevention is better than cure’, South Australia should not only play a key role in adaptation, but also mitigation”.

This same criticism can be applied to the Draft State Public Health Plan which focuses on adaptation without highlighting the importance of addressing both adaptation and mitigation. To quote from the Lancet article cited above: “any adaptation interventions must sit alongside the need for primary mitigation: reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.”

As stated in the draft Plan, adaptation will play an important part in helping communities cope with a changing and more unpredictable climate and severe weather events. However immediate implementation of effective mitigation measures is required to prevent a predicted rise in temperature that will lead to significant health impacts.

In 2013 the need for mitigation has become even more urgent. Emissions continue to rise steadily, indicating that collective global efforts are inadequate. For example, the Low Carbon Economy Index evaluates the rate of decarbonisation of the global economy that is needed to limit warming to 2°C. This report shows that global carbon intensity decreased between 2000 and 2011 by an average of only 0.8% a year (<http://www.pwc.co.uk/sustainability-climate-change/publications/low-carbon-economy-index-overview.ihtml>). To reach the 2°C warming target the global economy now needs to cut carbon intensity by 5.1% every year from now to 2050.

¹ Costello A, Abbas M, Allen A et al. Managing the health effects of climate change. Lancet and University College London, Institute for Global Health Commission. *Lancet* 2009; 373:1693-1733

Keeping to the 2°C warming target will require sustained and unprecedented reductions over four decades.

It is important when local and state government are “preparing for climate change” to note that even a 2°C temperature rise will present major challenges for SA when we consider that the current 0.7°C rise has already changed our weather patterns. Many states already have major expenditure in restitution and adaptation. With a 4°C rise predicted by the World Bank we can anticipate that the total health budget may be consumed on these tasks. Mitigation is an urgent priority and must be included, along with the resources required, in any local government measures to prepare for climate change.

Fortunately, measures to reduce carbon emissions also have health co-benefits in directly helping to improve the health of communities. Increased investment in sustainable and renewable living will reduce emissions, contribute to improved health and provide an economic benefit to local communities. Examples where local government can make a significant contribution include increased recreational spaces, walkways, bikeways, public transport, energy efficient buildings, water-saving measures, solar power and community gardens.

An excellent example of this is the Repower Port Augusta initiative. DEA has been active in supporting the Port Augusta City Council and community in advocating for renewable energy (concentrated solar thermal) to replace the current polluting and emission generating brown-coal fired power stations. This would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce ill health from coal pollution while, at the same time, providing sustainable employment opportunities in the local community.

The 2011 DEA Submission concluded:

“Not only should South Australia institute an adaptation plan, but also mitigate the effects of climate change by moving towards a low carbon and sustainable economy, allowing significant health and economic benefits.

We need politicians, key policy makers and industry to act now on Climate Change, for a healthier and more sustainable community for the future. This action is necessary for the continued health of South Australians and our neighbours. Preparation for the effects that climate change will have on the lives of South Australians is prudent and necessary. DEA believes that a considered, health focussed approach will have the best outcomes for all South Australians.”

Recommendations

1. In the Draft State Public Health Plan, the focus of the climate change priority must move from its current focus on adaptation to emphasize the urgency and priority of mitigation, with clear strategies outlined for various government and business groups.
2. Local government have an important role in advocacy and action within their communities and with the State government to address issues related to climate change. DEA can offer expert health advice to local government in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating initiatives responding to climate change. The DEA website (www.dea.org.au) has a number of resources and references prepared by experts that can be used to support local advocacy initiatives.

DEA members have been active in advocating with State and Federal politicians on climate change matters, including advocacy to Repower Port Augusta. In 2011 DEA conducted a Medical Expert Briefing to State Parliament (http://dea.org.au/images/general/Replacing_Northern_Playford.pdf) and is willing to arrange a similar briefing for leaders of local government to improve communication and common understandings of climate change issues.

DEA has a strong 'track record' in providing medical and health expertise in response to government enquiries and submissions see:

http://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/Env_Design_PH_Sub_Vic_11.07.2011.pdf

and

http://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/Social_Determinants_of_Health_10-12.pdf