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**JOINT STATEMENT - MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS CALL FOR
 EMISSIONS REDUCTION IN HEALTHCARE**
AMA and Doctors for the Environment

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) and Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) are today calling on the Australian healthcare sector to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2040, with an interim emission reduction target of 80 per cent by 2030.

Climate change is a health emergency, which is already contributing to life-threatening illness and deaths and the Australian healthcare sector is part of the problem – contributing about 7 per cent to Australia’s national carbon emission footprint¹.

Presently there is no coordinated approach in Australia across different jurisdictions to address and decrease emissions from the healthcare sector. A key recommendation of the AMA and DEA is for the Australian Government to establish a national sustainability unit for healthcare to reach the net zero emissions by 2040.

Such a unit would conduct regular and consistent monitoring of national healthcare carbon emissions along with other indicators of environmental impact to help ensure sustainable, high quality care with less waste, a greater focus on disease prevention, and more efficient operations.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said, “Transitioning to more environmentally-sustainable practices in the health sector is absolutely critical.

“Sustainable practices are proven to provide health benefits for patients and reduce operational costs.

“Having clear emission-reduction targets is necessary to ensure an action-oriented and ambitious approach,” he said.

Spokesperson for DEA Dr Eugenie Kayak says, “Every sector must play its part to reduce carbon emissions, and the healthcare sector, guided by the principle to ‘first, do no harm’, has an added duty to lead and take action to protect health.

“The Australian healthcare sector must be part of the solution and urgently reduce its carbon footprint in line with the science, to limit global warming, and to get its own house in order,” she said.

The widespread health harms from climate change are profound and impact all Australians and health services. To meet the Paris Agreement target of a 1.5°C global temperature rise, overall greenhouse gas emissions need to decrease by 7.6 per cent each year over the next decade.

The AMA and DEA have recommended several actions to enable emissions reduction in the healthcare sector:

- the establishment of a national sustainable healthcare unit;
- the prioritisation of prevention, primary care and sustainable models of care; and

- the procurement of medical equipment, pharmaceuticals and goods with low carbon footprints, and reduction in travel emissions through telemedicine and electric vehicle fleets.

Further recommendations made by DEA are outlined in DEA's report, [*Net zero carbon emissions: responsibilities, pathways and opportunities for Australia's healthcare sector*](#), including:

- 100 per cent renewable electricity and no new gas installations in Australian hospitals; and
- the establishment of a national net zero expert panel to assist in guiding interim emission reduction targets and pathways for the healthcare sector.

By leading emission reduction targets, the Australian healthcare sector can also influence other industries and sectors to adopt sustainable practices.

“Whole-of-society sustainable practices will lessen the widespread impacts that climate change is having on patient health – in Australia and globally,” said Dr Kayak.

Background

- The health sector has a huge opportunity to stop contributing to global warming. It has [large purchasing power](#) through how it procures energy, chooses goods and services and travel options.
- There are also [additional health benefits](#) from low carbon energy, transport and dietary choices – such as decreased air pollution and increased physical activity and reduced diet-related illnesses.
- A sustainable healthcare unit would assist the healthcare sector to deliver quality healthcare in environmentally and financially sustainable ways, including:
 - Co-ordinating targeted measurement of the healthcare sector's carbon footprint and environmental impact.
 - Analysing trends, benchmarking and assessment of carbon reduction strategies within clinical pathways, organisational processes, technology advancements and purchasing / manufacturing.
 - Leading and co-ordinating research, policy development, system changes and staff engagement to maximise effectiveness and successful implementation of initiatives at state, regional, health network, hospital and practice levels.

Resources

<https://ama.com.au/position-statement/environmental-sustainability-health-care-2019>

<https://www.dea.org.au/an-australian-healthcare-sustainability-unit-hsu-dea-proposal/>

17 March 2021

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¹ The Lancet (2018) <https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196%2817%2930180-8/fulltext>