

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

30 April 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

We write to you as a coalition of climate concerned health organisations in Australia that wish to see the threat to health from climate change addressed by the Australian Government.

Climate change is described by the World Health Organization as “the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century.”¹ Yet, climate action could be the greatest public health opportunity to prevent premature deaths, address climate and health inequity, slow down or reverse a decrease in life expectancy, and unlock substantial health and economic co-benefits.^{2,3}

To ensure that the health of all Australians is protected from the threat of climate change, we call on the Australian Government to:

1. Prioritise health in the context of Australia’s Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Agreement

A stable climate is a fundamental determinant of health and the aim to limit warming to 1.5°C is a critically important public health goal. The current emissions reductions target set by Australia is not sufficient to keep warming to 2°C.⁴ This threatens the health of Australians, and people around the world. Significantly increasing ambition by Australia in its Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement is needed to have a chance of avoiding the further disastrous health, economic, and environmental impacts of climate change.⁵ This would best be achieved by the creation of a body that will appropriately prioritise the setting of targets to meet those agreed to under the Paris Agreement.

¹World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/globalchange/global-campaign/cop21/en/>

²Andy Haines, Health co-benefits of climate action, The Lancet Planetary Health (2017), 1(1), e4-e5.

³Tom Kompas, Marcia Keegan & Ellen Witte, Australia’s Clean Economy Future: Costs and Benefits, MSSI Issues Paper 12, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, The University of Melbourne.

⁴“Australia: Fair Share,” Climate Action Tracker, <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia/fair-share/>

⁵Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, Daniela Jacob, Michael Taylor et al, Global Warming of 1.5°C: Impacts of 1.5°C Global Warming on Natural and Human Systems, special report prepared for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018), 177-181.

2. **Commit to the decarbonisation of the healthcare sector by 2040, and to the establishment of an Australian Sustainable Healthcare Unit**

The health sector is responsible for 7% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.⁶ Achieving net-zero healthcare will significantly contribute to emissions reductions in Australia and will lead to economic and health co-benefits.^{7,8} A target of net-zero emissions by 2040 for healthcare in Australia, with an interim emissions reduction target of 80% by 2030, is in line with similar commitments by the National Health Service in the United Kingdom – and is broadly consistent with the goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C.^{9,10,11} Establishing an Australian Sustainable Healthcare Unit in the Australian Government Department of Health is necessary to ensure standardised and consistent measurement of health sector emissions, mapping evidence-based approaches to emissions reductions, and achieving nation-wide health sector outcomes.

3. **Implement a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Wellbeing for Australia**

A key recommendation from the 2020 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change Policy Brief for Australia is the implementation of a national climate change and health strategy.¹² A Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Wellbeing has already been developed as guidance by the health sector and health experts, and is supported by more than 50 health organisations.¹³

By implementing the systematic and ambitious actions on climate change and health described above, the Australian Government will demonstrate its commitment to the health and wellbeing of Australians, the economy, and the environment. This will deliver a decrease in climate change associated morbidity and mortality and the associated economic costs, and unlock substantial benefits from a healthier and more prosperous society.

⁶Arunima Malik, Manfred Lenzen, Scott McAlister & Forbes McGain, The carbon footprint of Australian health care, *Lancet Planet Health* (2018), 2(1), e27–e35.

⁷Jinghong Gao, Sari Kovats, Sotiris Vardoulakis et al., Public health co-benefits of greenhouse gas emissions reduction: A systematic review, *Science of the Total Environment* (2018), 627, 388–402.

⁸Tom Kompas, Marcia Keegan & Ellen Witte, Australia's Clean Economy Future: Costs and Benefits, MSSI Issues Paper 12, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, The University of Melbourne.

⁹Doctors for the Environment Australia, Net zero carbon emissions: responsibilities, pathways and opportunities for Australia's healthcare sector, (2020) https://www.dea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/DEA-Net-Zero-report_v11.pdf

¹⁰Forbes McGain, Eugenie Kayak, Hayden Burch, A sustainable future in health: ensuring as health professionals our own house is in order and leading by example, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2020), 213(8), 381–381e1.

¹¹Delivering a 'Net Zero' National Health Service, (2020)

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenengland/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2020/10/delivering-a-net-zero-national-health-service.pdf>

¹²Georgia Behrens, Paul J Beggs, Ying Zhang, The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Policy brief for Australia, (2020), <https://www.lancetcountdown.org/resources/>

¹³Nick Horsburgh, Fiona Armstrong & Vanora Mulvenna, Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Wellbeing for Australia, (2017), https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/caha/pages/40/attachments/original/1498008324/CAHA_Framework_for_a_National_Strategy_on_Climate_Health_and_Well-being_v05_SCREEN_%28Full_Report%29.pdf?1498008324

Supporting Organisations

