

Leading medical group declares public health emergency and calls for national strategy to tackle climate change

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians is declaring climate change as a national public health emergency – urging all Governments to take action now to implement a national climate change strategy.

The Australian Government, and all state and territory governments need to take urgent action on climate change now in order to address this public health emergency.

Science is telling us that unchecked, climate change will worsen food and water shortages, increase the spread of climate-sensitive diseases, and increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. This will have serious consequences for public health and wellbeing.

The RACP has recommended the following actions, included in the 2019 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change policy brief:

1. Expedite a transition from fossil fuels to zero emission renewable energy across all economic sectors, with support to affected communities.
2. Develop a national climate change and health strategy. This strategy should build on the framework developed by the health sector to coordinate action on health-specific climate adaptation at all levels of Australian government.
3. Advance comprehensive and multi-sectoral heat hazard reduction strategies to minimise heat exposure and sensitivity across Australia. Pay particular attention to the needs of vulnerable populations.

The declaration of a public health emergency coincides with a high number of emergency level bushfires burning in Australia, resulting in a tragic loss of life and property.

Increasing frequency and intensity of bushfires is one of the consequences of climate change that has long been warned about by our science agencies. The sheer extent of the current fires has led to hazardous levels of air pollution that is adversely impacting on the health of people in affected areas including two of our biggest cities.

In addition to a national climate change strategy, the College is also calling for the establishment of sustainable development units within health departments and a speedy transition from fossil fuels to renewables in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

The RACP's policy position on climate change can be found here: <https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/policy-and-advocacy-priorities/climate-change-and-health>