Peak lung health body declares climate change a medical emergency

(Tuesday, 10th December 2019): The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ), Australia’s peak body representing lung health professionals, is today releasing a ‘Declaration on Climate Change’, joining other national and international health organisations¹ in calling climate change a medical emergency.

“It is logical and reasonable for us, as respiratory health professionals, to act on the strength of the evidence before us. And the evidence is clear: climate change is a medical emergency that is already impacting the health of our patients,” said TSANZ President Professor Bruce Thompson.

“TSANZ is therefore calling on our members and governments at all levels, including the Commonwealth of Australia and the New Zealand Government, to take immediate and sustained action to address this climate emergency,” he said.

As lung health experts, TSANZ is particularly concerned by climate change’s impact on respiratory health. Studies have established that the changes occurring in climate contribute to poor air quality and further exacerbate health risks.

Globally, an estimated 7 million people die prematurely every year due to air pollution.

In NSW, where forest fires have pushed Sydney onto the list of top 10 most polluted cities, health services have been inundated. NSW Ambulance fielded some 2330 calls for help with asthma or breathing difficulties over a single week - 30 per cent more than an average week - and, over the same period, hospitals across the state have had a 25 per cent increase in emergency department presentations for respiratory issues.

Whilst everyone has a moral duty to act, TSANZ is specifically calling on Australia to urgently implement policies to address climate change, including those supporting divestment from fossil fuels and investment in clean energy.

¹ Health organisations declaring climate change a medical emergency
The Australian Medical Association (AMA)
The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP)
The Australasian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM)
Doctors for the Environment Australia
The Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)
The American Medical Association
The American College of Physicians
The British Medical Association
The World Health Organization
“Business as usual is no longer an option. Given the central role of fossil fuels in driving climate breakdown and the increasing recognition of manifold impacts of climate change on health, the case for action cannot be ignored. Australia is one of the world’s largest fossil fuel exporters. It is therefore critical for Australia to immediately reduce fossil fuel exports and stem carbon emissions,” said Professor Thompson.

“Catastrophic climate change is not inevitable. But we will not succeed unless we recognise it as the emergency it is, and act proportionally,” he said.

ABOUT TSANZ
The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) is the only health peak body representing a range of professions (medical specialists, scientists, researchers, academics, nurses, physiotherapists, students and others) across various disciplines within the respiratory/sleep medicine field in Australia and New Zealand. TSANZ is a Health Promotion Charity. TSANZ is committed to serving the professional needs of its members by improving knowledge and understanding of lung disease, with the ultimate goals being to prevent respiratory illness through research and health promotion and to improve health care for people with respiratory illness.

To arrange an interview please contact TSANZ on 02 92226200.

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