

Climate Statement

The Health Equity Alliance acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the many lands affected by climate change across NSW. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture, and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Scientific evidence for warming of the climate system is unequivocal.¹ Scientists, countries and cities around the world, including Australian local governments, have now declared a state of climate emergency.^{2,3}

Climate change poses an unprecedented threat to the health of all Australians.⁴ In NSW, communities are not just facing this growing threat⁵ – they are already living with the impacts to their health and wellbeing.

Ongoing drought, heatwaves, bushfires and floods continue to impede people's access to vital services, clean air and water. Regional communities have been hit hardest, with ongoing conditions contributing to poor mental health, loss of shelter, financial hardship and higher rates of domestic violence.⁶

As climate change worsens, the direct and indirect impacts on health outcomes will only increase. These include the consequences of various processes of environmental change and ecological disruption that occur in response to climate change, such as higher risk of pandemics and food- and water-borne diseases. There are also the diverse health consequences – traumatic, nutritional, psychological and other – that will occur in communities under stress from climate-induced economic and environmental decline, dwindling resources, displacement and conflict situations.⁷

People experiencing poverty and disadvantage will experience these impacts first and be hit the hardest. They experience more financial strain, reduced options, less power and self-determination, and fewer social connections to cope, adapt or recover. They are also most likely to live in higher risk climate-affected areas.^{8,9}

Failing to slow climate change will cause greater health inequity in the future. There is still an opportunity to mitigate the impact of climate change by acting now.

PRINCIPLES

- 1 Climate change is already occurring in NSW and the impact on health outcomes will continue to worsen. Failure to slow climate change through emissions reduction at a sufficient rate is a significant threat to the human right to health and wellbeing.
- 2 NSW needs a strong climate response that is equitable, meets the diverse needs of our communities and supports those who are most vulnerable and their carers.
- 3 Climate change significantly impacts Aboriginal communities around NSW and influences the connectedness to country. Cultural knowledge of nurturing country should be respected and be key to climate change mitigation, resilience and adaptation.
- 4 The health system, workforce and infrastructure must have capacity and readiness to respond to extreme climate change-induced events.
- 5 Improving environmental sustainability in healthcare will deliver better outcomes for communities.
- 6 Policy and planning for climate change mitigation, resilience and adaptation must be co-designed with communities and people with lived experience to address the imbalance of power in key decision-making and advocacy processes. Community voices should be embedded at all levels of decision-making and individuals and communities need to be empowered to strive towards self-determination.
- 7 Strong, proactive leadership and commitment at all levels of government is needed to respond to climate change.

PRIORITIES

THE HEALTH EQUITY ALLIANCE CALLS ON THE NSW GOVERNMENT TO:



1 Embed climate change impact assessment, mitigation and adaptation into all government strategic planning and budgeting processes, including at Local Health District level.



2 Develop and implement a strategy to improve sustainability and reduce the carbon footprint of NSW hospital and healthcare facilities.



3 Enhance the capacity of the health system to protect and improve population health in the face of climate change, with specific focus on adequate supports for vulnerable groups and their carers.



4 Resource the non-government health, community services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation sector to develop and implement climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.



5 Expand the NSW Climate Change Council to include representation on behalf of the non-government health and community services sector, health consumers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



6 Introduce a NSW Climate Change Act that sets out a net zero emissions target by 2035, and requires the NSW Government to develop a 5 year climate change strategy and adaptation action plan, and establish transparent reporting mechanisms on mitigation actions.



7 Advocate at a national level for the adoption of the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia.

The Health Equity Alliance brings together non-government organisations, peak organisations, representatives from academia and other interested parties to develop and advance the policy responses needed to improve health outcomes for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in NSW.

The Alliance further acknowledges and endorses the [Community Sector Climate Change Declaration 2021](#), the [Climate and Health Alliance \(CAHA\) climate statement](#), and the [CAHA Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia](#).

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Endnotes

- 1 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2014, Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report, Contribution of Working Groups I, II, and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland
- 2 Barnard, P, Moomaw, WR, Newsome, TM, Ripple, WJ & Wolf, C 2020, 'World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency', BioScience, vol.1, iss.1, January, pp.8-12, viewed 3 February 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biz088>
- 3 Cedamia 2020, 'Climate emergency declarations in 1,385 jurisdictions and local governments cover 815 million citizens', Climate Emergency Declaration, 18 February, viewed 19 February 2020, <https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/climate-emergency-declarations-cover-15-million-citizens/>
- 4 Climate and Health Alliance 2019, 'An open letter to political parties and candidates: Australian Election 2019', open letter, Climate and Health Alliance, viewed 19 February 2020, https://www.caha.org.au/caha_launch_federal_election_campaign
- 5 Office of Environment & Heritage 2010, Observed changes in New South Wales climate 2010, NSW Government, viewed 28 May 2020, <https://climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au/About-climate-change-in-NSW/Evidence-of-climate-change/Observed-NSW-climate-change>
- 6 Whittenbury, KL 2013, 'Climate change, women's health, wellbeing and experiences of gender based violence in Australia', Research, Action and Policy: Addressing the Gendered Impacts of Climate Change, pp.207-221, viewed 3 February 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5518-5_15
- 7 World Health Organization 2003, Climate change and human health - risks and responses: Summary, World Health Organization, viewed 28 May 2020, <https://www.who.int/globalchange/summary/en/index2.html>
- 8 Councils of Social Service Network 2019, 'COSS Climate Statement', Australian Council of Social Service, 12 December, viewed 3 February 2020, <https://www.acoss.org.au/coss-climate-statement/>
- 9 Islam, SN & Winkel, J 2017, Climate Change and Social Inequality, DESA Working Paper No.152, Department of Economic & Social Affairs, United Nations, viewed 3 February 2020, https://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2017/wp152_2017.pdf