

Joint statement on the health effects of Australia's minerals and energy policy

This statement was developed following a Health and Energy Roundtable hosted by Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA), Climate Change Health Research Network (NCCARF-ARN), and Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) on 12 February 2013.

The joint statement is signed by Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA), Climate Change Health Research Network (NCCARF-ARN), Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA), Cancer Council Australia, Heart Foundation, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), National Toxics Network (NTN), Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA), and NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA).

The joint statement was released on 13 February 2013 as the groups announced their intention to work together collaboratively to highlight the adverse health impacts and environmental damages associated with current minerals energy policy, particularly those relating to coal and coal seam gas.

Health effects of Australia's minerals and energy policy

"The risks to human health from energy and resources policy are not being accounted for in current policy decisions.

"Significant policy reform is needed to ensure health and wellbeing is not compromised by policy decisions in other sectors. Recognising the importance of the social and environmental determinants of health is an important part of that.

"The overriding concern is that climate change is being driven by energy choices and minerals policies that privilege and prioritise the extraction and combustion of fossil fuels over safer, healthier, lower emissions, renewable energy resources.

"The local health impacts from coal mining, transportation and combustion are also a significant concern, and communities living in proximity to these activities are experiencing adverse social impacts, such as loss of amenity, displacement, and loss of social capital as well as facing increased risks of respiratory disease, heart disease, and lung cancer.

"The rapid expansion of the fossil fuel (coal and unconventional gas) industries in Australia demands these issues be urgently addressed.

"There are serious concerns raised about the availability of data and support for health research on this issue.

“A lack of monitoring and inadequate investment in research means there is grossly insufficient data available in Australia on health impacts to inform policy decisions. Research from international sources suggests major cause for concern in terms of exposure to pollution of water and air – these impacts need to be evaluated here in Australia.

“The health impacts of minerals and energy policy must be an area of research priority that is given significant levels of independent funding, and there needs to be greatly increased surveillance and monitoring to ensure sufficient data collection on which to base this research.

“There is a need for education for health professionals and the community more broadly around the health implications of energy policy choices, health professionals across all disciplines are encouraged to advocate for minerals, energy and climate policies on the basis of health.

“Health professionals have an important role to play in educating decision makers and the community about the health implications of energy choices and the health implications of climate change.

“The local and global effect of fossil fuel use on health and wellbeing is an immediate problem as well as an issue of intergenerational equity, with the exploitation of these resources causing irreversible harm to Earth's systems, compromising the health and security of future generations.”

