



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **World Health Organization highlights the invisible killer: air pollution**

*World Health Assembly issues first ever resolution on air pollution and health*

The Climate and Health Alliance has welcomed the landmark resolution from the World Health Assembly on air pollution and health, recognising the huge costs from this often invisible, but deadly hazard.

"Australians are facing declining air quality in our cities and urban areas and increasingly in rural settings where industrial activities, such as coal mining and coal transport, create high levels of dangerous air pollution," said CAHA President, Dr Liz Hanna.

Air pollution causes a variety of health impacts, and leads to hospitalisation for asthma, respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, including pneumonia and acute bronchitis, and contributes to deaths from heart attacks, strokes, and cancers.<sup>1,2</sup>

"This resolution places further pressure on Australian governments to urgently act to properly regulate to improve air quality," said Dr Hanna

"A largely unaware Australian public are increasingly at risk from poor air quality. Air pollution is a major risk to people's health. This statement from the World Health Assembly underscores the evidence that an urgent response is required to reduce deaths and illnesses from air pollution."

Outdoor (ambient) air pollution is largely associated with fossil fuel based energy sources, such as coal combustion for electricity (75% of Australia's electricity comes from coal), liquid fuels for transport, and woodsmoke from domestic heating. Ground level ozone created from vehicle emissions and sunshine triggers heart attacks and respiratory problems. Deaths from air pollution are estimated to cost between \$11.1 and \$24.3 billion annually.<sup>3</sup> Poor indoor air quality is also a concern, estimated to cost \$12 billion per annum.<sup>4</sup>

Air pollution from coal and diesel are particular risks, as both are now known to cause cancer. [These deaths are preventable](#). "Stronger air quality standards are needed to protect the health of all Australians," Dr Hanna said.

"Reducing pollution from transport must be a priority, given the large number of people exposed in our cities. Major sources of air pollution must be monitored, and penalties instituted for exceeding air quality standards.

The Australian population rightly expects clean air, to be able to take a deep breath, confident that it will not harm them, Dr Hanna said. "We don't allow industry to get away with any other kind of pollution, so it's high time we created a deterrent to polluting the air, especially when it is people's health, and lives, at stake."

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<sup>1</sup> Summary for policy makers of the Health Risk Assessment on air pollution in Australia (2013). National Environment Protection Council. Available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/dfe7ed5d-1eaf-4ff2-bfe7-dbb7ebaf21a9/files/summary-policy-makers-hra-air-pollution-australia.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Note: due to a degree of overlapping health effects between pollutants, cases

<sup>2</sup> Begg S, Vos T, Barker B, Stevenson C, Stanley L and Lopez A (2007) The burden of disease and injury in Australia 2003. Cat. no. PHE 82. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra. Available at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=6442467990>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/e60c698a-ea71-4f3f-8c01-30213f1512e1/files/ncaa-discussion-paper.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/environment-protection/air-quality/indoor-air>

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