

Safeguarding health and wellbeing in the climate crisis

**Climate and Health Alliance 2024/25
Pre-Budget Submission**

January 2023

About the Climate and Health Alliance

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is a national charity and the peak body on climate change and health in Australia. CAHA is an alliance of organisations within the health sector working together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions. The membership of CAHA includes a broad cross-section of health sector stakeholders with over 100 member organisations (Appendix 1), representing healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as healthcare service providers, institutions, academics, researchers, and consumers.

Acknowledgment

The Climate and Health Alliance recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and acknowledge that sovereignty of the land we call Australia has never been ceded. We commit to listening to and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about how we can better reflect First Nations ways of being and knowing in our work.

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Introduction

After over a decade of advocacy from the climate and health sectors, Australia's first [National Health and Climate Strategy](#) (the Strategy) was launched on 3 December 2023 by the Hon. Ged Kearney MP, Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care at the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP28) in Dubai. The Strategy was developed in "*recognition of the urgent need to address the health risks associated with climate change*", marking a significant shift in Australia's domestic policy on the climate and health nexus.

Throughout the consultation processes, stakeholders called for a [Health in All Policies](#) (HiAP), whole-of-government approach, where climate and health leadership is supported throughout all Commonwealth Government policy planning and supports existing and future work of state and territory governments. CAHA is pleased to see the Strategy has made significant progress towards that end.

However, if the social and economic co-benefits of action on climate and health are to be realised, investment must be made into the actions of the Strategy and whole-of-government structures to support it. Commonwealth portfolios outside of Health and Aged Care — including Transport, Climate Change, Water and the Environment, Social Services, Indigenous Affairs and the Treasury — must all work towards improving the systems that underpin climate and health outcomes. That includes the rapid decarbonisation of the health sector and the broader Australian economy. State and territory governments must be supported, through leadership and funding, to develop and implement place-based prevention programs and infrastructure. Civil society must be equipped to foster collaboration and cooperation for a healthier, safer climate for all people living in Australia.

To that end, in collaboration with our members and allies, the Climate and Health Alliance has developed its 'Safeguarding health and wellbeing in the climate crisis Pre-Budget Submission' to provide the Commonwealth Treasury with guidance on how the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget can better support climate and health outcomes.

Our submission proposes three key recommendations:

1. Decarbonise Australia's economy
2. Fund the implementation of Australia's first National Health and Climate Strategy
3. Fund civil society leadership on climate and health

We welcome the opportunity to contribute a submission to the Treasury and look forward to working with the Commonwealth Government on these recommendations.

Why climate and health matters to the economy

Australia is one of the wealthiest nations on earth, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accounting for [~1.6% of the global economy](#) — approximately [\\$2 trillion](#) — a year. This wealth is in part generated through the extraction of fossil fuels, including coal, gas and iron ore, and their exportation around the world.

While this wealth has been used to make [significant investments](#) in crucial public infrastructure including roads, health and education facilities, public housing and the social safety net, it has also been used to [subsidise activities](#) of local and international organisations responsible for the climate crisis. In the 2022-23 financial year alone, fossil fuel subsidies cost the government and taxpayers \$11.1 billion. These subsidies could be used to make investments in green energy infrastructure and re-skilling the workforce for the energy transition.

[Climate change itself is also costly.](#) Current estimates suggest the worsening climate crisis could cost the Australian economy an extra \$584.5 billion by 2030, \$762 billion by 2050 and more than \$5 trillion in cumulative damages from now until 2100.

These economy-wide costs have significant impacts on individuals, families and communities, driving up the burden of healthcare costs and productivity losses. The cost of living crisis and inflation pressures mean those who are already experiencing vulnerability are further compromised through the impacts of climate change on health.

Climate change is affecting health outcomes of people all around the world, directly and indirectly, [by impacting the physical, natural, and social systems](#) on which wellbeing depends. According to the [World Health Organization](#), between 2030 and 2050 climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year globally, from undernutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress alone.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [Sixth Assessment report](#) identifies 11 categories of diseases and health outcomes that are influenced by climate change, or are “climate-sensitive”, all of which are being experienced across Australia. The Australian population has seen a [rise in injuries, illness, displacement and deaths](#) caused by extreme weather events. Incremental climatic changes such as increases in temperature have a significant impact on excess ambulance demand, hospital admissions and mortality in [several sites across Australia](#). Bushfires [affect population health](#) through direct exposure to fire, exposure to bushfire smoke, the trauma associated with proximity to a fire front, and loss of home or business and associated

forced relocation. According to the [IPCC report](#), the 2019/2020 mega-bushfire season in Australia followed extreme drought and high temperatures, and was at least 30% more likely to occur compared to a century ago due to the influence of climate change. The 2019/2020 bushfires caused 33 deaths directly and exposed millions of people to heavy particulate pollution. Additionally, bushfire smoke caused 417 deaths, 3,151 hospital admissions for cardiovascular or respiratory conditions, and about 1,300 emergency department presentations for asthma. Smoke-related health costs from the 2019-20 fires are estimated at A\$1.95 billion. The report also outlined that in Australia, the annual number of days over 35°C is projected to increase 20-70% by 2030. Heat-related excess deaths in Australian cities are projected to increase by 200-400% during 2031-2080 relative to 1971-2020. Total costs of heat-related impacts for the city of Melbourne for 2012-2051 have been projected to be A\$1.9 billion, of which A\$1.6 billion is human health/mortality costs.

While Australia is the home of the longest surviving continuing culture on earth, First Nations peoples are amongst those most affected by climate change, and [these inequalities are anticipated to worsen as climate-related health risks increase](#). Cultural impacts of climate change on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are incalculable.

This is simply unsustainable.

Why we **must act**

The current health impacts of climate change in Australia



Extreme weather events

Heatwaves, storms, floods and fires are increasing in Australia and will worsen leading to illness, loss of life and livelihoods, and increasing pressure on our health services.

These events are increasing the risk and incidence of climate-related mental illness and stress



Pollution and aeroallergens

Burning coal, oil and gas creates harmful local air pollution, estimated to cost Australia \$5.3 billion pa.

Droughts and heatwaves contribute to dust storms and bushfires, both additional sources of harmful air pollution.

Rising temperatures increase ground level ozone and aeroallergens, aggravating allergic and respiratory conditions, and amplifying the toxic effect of other air pollutants.

Pollution of our waterways, soil and water is also a major health risk. This is occurring from the overuse of toxic chemicals & plastics and other pollutants.



Sea level rise

Coastal inundation from sea level rise threatens food production, health, homes, livelihoods, and culture. Sea level rise also compounds other threats to the availability and quality of fresh water.



Infectious diseases

Through biodiversity loss and a warmer climate, the range and prevalence of vector-borne and zoonotic diseases is increasing, threatening a larger proportion of the Australian population.



Food and water security

Changing weather patterns associated with climate change are impacting agriculture, fisheries, and water supply, jeopardising rural livelihoods and endangering Australia's food and water security.

Populations at greater risk

Vulnerable populations suffer disproportionately from the adverse health impacts of climate change, with people with pre-existing medical conditions, older people, young, disabled, socioeconomically disadvantaged and Indigenous Australians particularly vulnerable.

Women in particular are disproportionately impacted by climate change, as long-standing social, cultural and economic gender inequalities are exacerbated by climate-related hazards.

Hotter temperatures are also putting outdoor and manual labourers at increased risk of heat-related illnesses, work accidents and death, while the extreme weather events are increasing occupational risks and demands on emergency services.

Figure 1: *'Why we must act'* - submission to the Department of Health and Aged Care on the National Health and Climate Strategy, Climate and Health Alliance

Addressing the health threats of climate change are complex, but utterly achievable. Policies that achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating jobs are win-win-win options, and should be at the heart of Australia's response to the climate crisis. Fortunately, in Australia we have the wealth of knowledge and economic resources necessary to [meet the challenge of climate change head-on](#). A [healthy, regenerative and just future](#) is not just possible, it is scientifically, economically, culturally, socially and technologically feasible. By making the right investments today, we can create a future which benefits everyone, including future generations.

In July 2023, the Commonwealth Treasurer, the Hon. Dr Jim Chalmers MP launched the '[Measuring What Matters Framework](#)' (the Framework) — Australia's answer to a [wellbeing economy](#) — which "*aims to track progress towards a more healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous Australia*". The Framework offers a unique opportunity for Australia to think seriously about shifting from an economy driven by short-term unabated growth, to one that is driven by opportunities that bring us into harmony with the planet and ensure long-term prosperity. This means fulfilling the commitment of the [UAE Consensus](#), by tripling our renewable energy and rapidly phasing out fossil fuel extraction. It means investing in preventive health, workforce development and health service provision. It means fostering a whole-of-government approach to climate change that addresses housing, transport, social services to reap the rewards of win-win-win policy. And, it means working with our First Nations communities to enable self-determination and connection to Country that restores stewardship of land and traditional land management practices.

The outcome of the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget has never been more important to the future wellbeing of all people living in Australia. [2023 was the hottest year on record](#). As the [planet continues to warm](#), and the health impacts of climate change worsen, it is crucial that the economy is oriented towards a greener, healthier future. There is no time left to waste.

Recommendations for the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget

Climate change has been described as the [greatest threat to human health this century](#). Without urgent, effective action, it threatens to undermine the last 50 years of health gains. On behalf of our members and allies, the Climate and Health Alliance makes the following recommendations to the Commonwealth Treasury as to how the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget can best support climate and health outcomes in the next fiscal year.

1. Decarbonise Australia's economy

2023 was the hottest year on record. Without the rapid decarbonisation of Australia's economy, and investment in critical adaptation infrastructure, the health impacts of the climate crisis will continue to worsen.

The Climate and Health Alliance recommend the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget:

- Endorses a science-backed emissions reduction target of 75% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2035, in line with best-evidence from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- Fund the Commonwealth Government's commitment to the UAE Consensus to triple renewable energy capacity and transitioning away from fossil fuel energy systems including gas.
- Eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, and reinvest savings into critical adaptation infrastructure, including health services.
- Develop climate and health indicators within the Measuring What Matters Framework to orient government policy towards win-win-win climate and health solutions.

2. Fund the implementation of Australia's first National Health and Climate Strategy

Australia's first National Health and Climate Strategy (the Strategy) was launched on 3rd December 2023 at the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP28) in Dubai. The Strategy was developed in "[recognition of the urgent need to address the health risks associated with climate change](#)", marking a significant shift in Australia's domestic policy on the climate and health nexus. However, without funding, the Strategy will do [little to improve climate and health outcomes](#).

The Climate and Health Alliance recommend the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget:

- Invest in expanding the capacity of the National Health, Sustainability and Climate Unit in the Department of Health and Aged Care (\$3.5 million over three years) via: recruitment of personnel to oversee the development of governance structures to implement the Strategy; collaboration with state and territory governments on the implementation of key programs and future activities; collaboration with Commonwealth portfolios to ensure a Health in All Policies approach to implementation; and, collaboration with civil society, experts and community.
- Invest in the decarbonisation of the health system by fully funding the [Global Green and Healthy Hospitals](#) initiative (\$300,000 over three years). This includes building communities of practice based on key areas of work necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from delivery of care, as well as running collaborative pilot projects with health services, creation of resources, and delivering sustainable healthcare events.
- Providing funding grants for state and territory governments (\$10 million over three years).
- Invest in the 'Continuing Professional Development' program (\$200,000 over one year) on climate change and health for all health workers to ensure capacity development and leadership.

3. Fund civil society leadership on climate and health

The Climate and Health Alliance has played the role of a peak body on climate change and health since 2010. With the election of the Albanese government and the welcomed commitment to a positive climate change and health agenda, the demand on our services has increased dramatically. Government departments and agencies, healthcare institutions, associations, healthcare service providers and community members are all looking to us to provide support, guidance and advice. Capacity and resources for this work have traditionally relied on modest membership fees and philanthropic funding, as well as pro bono and in-kind support. In order to scale up to meet demand, we require additional funding beyond the level on which we, and our members, have been able to secure in the past.

The Climate and Health Alliance also fully support the Lowitja Institute's funding call for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition on Climate and Health (the Coalition). As per the Lowitja Institute's '[Business case for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition on Climate and Health](#)': *"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in this space is being overlooked and ignored by government, and our peoples are being excluded from policymaking. Our peoples want to be included in key national decision-making about Country, climate, and health, and in driving solutions on the ground. We want to be able to maximise opportunities for developing and increasing our climate and health workforce, including in research. At the same time,*

there is insufficient resourcing or compensation available for our peoples and organisations to participate or contribute. The will is there but government support is required to empower our leadership in this space". The formation of the Coalition will facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership that will not only benefit health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples, but all people living in Australia.

The Climate and Health Alliance recommend the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget:

- Funds the Climate and Health Alliance as the peak body for climate and health in Australia (\$3 million over three years). See the Climate and Health Alliance's [FY22-23 Annual Report](#) for further information.
- Fund the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition on Climate and Health as per the Lowitja Institute's prospectus (\$8 million over four years).

Summary

The outcome of the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget has never been more important to the future wellbeing of all people living in Australia. As the planet continues to warm, and the health impacts of climate change worsen, it is crucial that the economy is oriented towards a greener, healthier future.

The Climate and Health Alliance calls on the Commonwealth Government to safeguard health and wellbeing in the climate crisis through investment in critical infrastructure and services including:

Activity	Amount	Term
Building capacity of the National Health, Sustainability and Climate Unit	\$3.5 million	Three years
Support healthcare decarbonisation through the work of the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals initiative	\$300,000	Three years
Support mitigation and adaptation through funding grants for state and territory governments	\$10 million	Three years
Secure capacity development and leadership among health workers through the Continuing Professional Development program	\$200,000	One year
Fund civil society leadership via the work of the Climate and Health Alliance	\$3 million	Three years
Funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership via the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition on Climate and Health	\$8 million	Four years

Appendix: Climate and Health Alliance Members

CAHA membership as of December 2023.

