

Climate Change & Health Policy

Preamble

The Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) is the peak representative body of Australia's medical students. AMSA believes that all communities have the right to the best attainable health. Accordingly, AMSA actively seeks to advocate on issues that may impact health outcomes.

Climate change, in particular global warming, has been regarded by experts as the "biggest global health threat of the 21st century".¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the leading scientific body established by the World Meteorological Organization and by the United Nations Environment Programme to assess the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant for the understanding of the risk of human-induced climate change. In 2007, the IPCC released its fourth assessment report outlining compelling evidence regarding the potential impact of unmitigated climate change on the natural environment and communities worldwide.² Furthermore the World Health Organisation, in addition to academic experts, have outlined the profound effect climate change will have on the health of the global human population.³

Due to the inseparable relationship that exists between climate change and health, AMSA considers it impossible to genuinely advocate for better health outcomes without simultaneously advocating for meaningful action on climate change.

Policy

The following statements and recommendations are in keeping with comprehensive evidence cited by leading bodies, including the IPCC and WHO, and serve to support AMSA's role in advocating on the impact of climate change on health.

AMSA affirms its stance that:

1. climate change, particularly global warming, is directly attributable to human activity.
2. climate change is a key determinant of human health.
3. climate change will have a net negative effect on human health, substantially increasing global morbidity and mortality.
4. the impact of climate change on health will be unequal and disproportionately affect the world's most disadvantaged.
5. immediate and sustainable action needs to be taken at a local, national and global level to reduce the effects of climate change.
6. acting early on climate change will be cheaper, fairer and result in better health outcomes.
7. a principle of equity needs to govern climate change interventions and measures.
8. the cost of tackling climate change needs to be shared fairly between citizens and nations.
9. Australia needs to be a world leader in preventing further climate change and mitigating against its effects.
10. Australia needs to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, actively support international mitigation measures to reduce global emissions, and to plan to adapt to climate change impacts.
11. Australia should use its diplomatic and economic influence to promote the development of alternatives to greenhouse gas intensive sources of energy.
12. health should be a core consideration of all interventions against climate change.
13. the medical profession has a key practical and advocacy role in preventing climate change and preparing for its likely consequences for health.
14. medical students need to be aware of the effects of climate change on health.

Accordingly, based on the above principles, AMSA calls upon:

15. The medical profession to play a key role in addressing climate change and health, and believes that;
 1. Climate change and its relationship to health should be integrated within the medical curricula of Australian medical schools.
 2. Medical students, practitioners as individuals, as well as organisations representing the interests of medical students and practitioners, should take the lead in educating the public on the likely effects of climate change on health, as well as directly lobbying key stakeholders including government, to take action on the issue.
16. The federal government to commit to a significant reduction in Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by:
 1. Achieving the greatest feasible reduction in greenhouse gas emissions at a minimum of 25-40% of 1990 levels by 2020 and 80% by 2050 in accordance with the IPCC recommendations(2).
 2. Acting early to develop and implement low carbon technologies such as *Carbon Capture & Sequestration*.
 3. The establishment of future energy supply through sustainable and renewable sources.
 4. Decreasing total energy consumption by implementing measures and technologies that increase efficiency of supply and decrease end-use.
 5. Collaborating with other countries, particularly low-income nations, to assist their reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
17. The federal government of Australia to implement measures to mitigate the inevitable impacts of climate change on health, including:
 1. Funding further research into the likely consequences of climate change on health.
 2. Training a health workforce capable of effectively managing the health effects of climate change.
 3. Investing in improving water and food security.
 4. Improving Australia's ability to respond humanely and generously to individuals displaced by climate change.
 5. Supporting communities whose health and livelihoods are most likely to be adversely affected by climate change such as rural and remote communities and low-socioeconomic communities.
 6. Providing relief aid and development assistance to support other countries, particularly low-income nations to mitigate the effects of global climate change.

References

1. Costello A, Abbas M, Allen A, Ball S, Bell S, Bellamy R, et al. Managing the health effects of climate change. *The Lancet*. 2009, 373:1693–1733
2. IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, 2007.
3. WHO Fact Sheet (Nº 266) - Climate and Health. August 2007.