

## Climate Health WA Inquiry

### About your submission

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or group?

No

Yes

If yes, please identify the organisation:

### Your contact details

The following information will not be published without your permission but enables the Inquiry to contact you about your submission if required.

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### Publication of submissions

Submissions will be published with the name of the submitter unless otherwise indicated below. Do you consent to be identified in the published submission?

Yes, I / my organisation agree to be identified

No, I / my organisation request to remain anonymous

### Terms of Reference

You are encouraged to address at least ONE of the Terms of Reference as listed below. Please select which item/s you will address:

- 1. Establish current knowledge on the implications of climate change for health in Western Australia (WA) and recommend a framework for evaluating future implications.
- 2. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will protect the public from the harmful health impacts of climate change.
- 3. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will strengthen the preparedness and resilience of communities and health services against extreme weather events, with a focus on the most vulnerable in the community.

- 4. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will reduce the contribution of WA health services to climate change and other detrimental impacts.
- 5. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will enable WA Health services to implement change, including energy efficiency, to a more sustainable model.
- 6. Evaluate the likely benefits (health and wellbeing, social and economic) arising from climate change mitigation strategies, with a focus on WA health services.
- 7. Define the role of the Department of Health in leading public policy on climate change and health.
- 8. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for undertaking a climate change vulnerability assessment for the health sector.
- 9. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for developing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the health sector.

### Submissions response field

**Please type your response to the item(s) selected above into the field below. Alternatively you may provide your submission as a separate attachment (suggested maximum 5 pages).**

27/09/2019

The Project Director  
Climate Health WA Inquiry  
Public and Aboriginal Health Division PO Box 8172  
Perth Business Centre WA 6849

To Whom It May Concern,

Our world's deteriorating climate conditions do and will impact human wellbeing. I believe that the Western Australian Department of Health has a duty to implement more sustainable health solutions, and to prepare for the future health implications of climate change on WA citizens.

As climate change begins to alter our state's weather patterns, extreme weather events could have a significant impact on local health (Spickett, Brown, & Katcherian, 2011). Already, many of Western Australia's most vulnerable people struggle to access adequate heating, cooling, and health care, and recent droughts pose a threat to both the agricultural industry and suburban food security. Changes to climate could affect the spread of disease; rising sea levels may have negative consequences for housing and infrastructure availability; and air pollution may contribute to increased rates of respiratory illness. Eco-mediated disease health impacts will occur as our ecosystem sustains greater levels of damage (Zhang & Beggs, 2018).

#### Treatment & Provision Strategies

The Department of Health must prepare to respond to the impact of climate events on community health.

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Water purification and recycling processes may help to reduce the impact of drought.

Community centres could be established to provide necessary resources (including heating and cooling) to those in need. This could help to ease the burden on the state's hospital system by reducing rates of temperature and weather related illness. It could also work to lower energy consumption, providing members of the community with the opportunity to share resources.

The government should act to promote public transport as a more sustainable alternative to driving, and reuse/recycling programs should be supported by the state government and local councils.

#### Sustainable Solutions to Care

Unfortunately, the health sector relies on a number of practices that are unlikely to be sustainable for Western Australia's long-term future. While adequate patient care must remain the Department of Health's top priority, our state should endeavour to consider more sustainable care solutions where possible, working to reduce carbon emissions and promote green practices.

Western Australian hospitals and health services should, where applicable, act to reduce waste and pollution. When patient health will not be compromised, treatments should aim to make use of more sustainable products and tools, and sustainable alternatives to plastics should be considered. Facilities may opt to replace plastic cutlery and containers with bamboo and stainless steel products.

In Western Australia, where sunlight is a plentiful natural resource, solar energy solutions should be investigated and used to support, or back-up, more traditional energy sources in medical care facilities.

Health professionals have an influential role in the lives of the patients they treat. They should aim to promote climate consideration and sustainability, focusing on the implications relevant to patient health and rates of disease. Professionals should be aware of their power to incite change.

#### Community Involvement

Western Australia's Department of Health has one key asset in the fight against climate change: the Western Australian population. The Department should work to provide educational programs that allow members of the local community to become involved in our state's response to climate change. Awareness programs could be implemented to provide the community with a greater understanding of the ways in which climate affects Western Australia's natural environment and the health of the people who live here.

The Department could consider implementing a climate health rating system for products, similar to the health star rating system already used for many food goods. This information availability could act to arm local businesses, providers, and

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consumers with important climate knowledge and inspire responsible industry.

#### Key Recommendations:

- Ensuring climate-related illness preparedness
- Community centres providing heating/cooling and other resources to vulnerable people
- Introduction of more sustainable products and systems in health care facilities
- Water recycling and capitalisation on solar energy resources
- Education and awareness programs, and professional responsibility
- Implementation of a climate health rating system for food and other goods

Western Australia has the opportunity to be a leader in climate change prevention and preparedness strategies. Together, our state can make a difference, for ourselves, for our nation, and for our world.

Sincerely,  
Shannon Jade Burns.

#### References

Spickett, J. T., Brown, H. L., & Katscherian, D. (2011). Adaptation strategies for health impacts of climate change in Western Australia: Application of a Health Impact Assessment framework. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 31(3), 297-300. Doi: 10.1016/j.eiar.2010.07.001.

Zhang, Y. & Beggs, P. J. (2018). The Lancet Countdown down under: tracking progress on health and climate change in Australia. *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 208(7), 285-286. Doi: 10.5694/mja17.01245.

**Please complete this sheet and submit with any attachments to: Climate Health WA Inquiry**