

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The following information will not be published without your permission but enables the Inquiry to contact you about your submission if required.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

Climate change is creating a public health emergency. Unless our nation's leaders respond, and respond with urgency, health harms will dramatically increase as climate change worsens.

Extreme heat, powerful storms and floods, year-round wildfires, droughts and other climate-related events have already taken far too many lives and displaced many people in Australia from their homes, including here in Western Australia.

People are experiencing heat illness, worsening respiratory conditions like asthma, declining mental health, and infectious and insect-borne diseases – all health impacts that are directly related to impacts of climate change, like increased air pollution, water contamination and increased heat waves.

Climate change threatens the very foundations of what we need to thrive: clean air, clean water, nutritious food for all and vibrant communities.

While the health and well-being of all Australians is at risk, the health impacts of climate change are not evenly shared. Many of the most vulnerable Australians -- including pregnant women, children, the elderly, people with chronic illnesses, outdoor workers, and people in low income communities and Indigenous communities -- are most affected.

Children, who face special risks from air pollution because their lungs are still developing and because they are often more active outdoors. In Perth more than 1 in 9 children with asthma are especially vulnerable. 1 in 10 adults with asthma will also be seriously affected.

- The elderly, who are at higher risk of health problems from the impact of climate change. In Perth all of the elderly deserve protection from the harms of climate

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change.

- People with chronic illness, who also risk greater harm from the impacts of climate change. In Perth in 2011, 13% of the population suffered with cardiovascular disease, which means they face greater risk.

- In Perth 1% of the population are people of Indigenous background. These communities often face higher exposure to dangerous pollutants, fewer options to relocate after extreme weather events, and a lack of access to resources that foster and maintain good health.

- Policies that help reduce climate change will directly benefit these communities. The voices, power and capacity of these communities must be engaged in full partnership as these policies are implemented to build a healthy and climate-resilient future.

Mobilizing for policy action now will determine the magnitude of climate impacts on future generations. The health sector needs to take action to promote and protect health in the era of climate change, but we cannot do it alone.

To promote better health and wellbeing, and to protect human health from the ravages of climate change now and into the future, I call on our nation's leaders in government, business and the civil sector, including the WA Health Department here in WA, to heed the urgent call of health professionals and health organizations by immediately beginning to take steps to limit climate disruption and build climate resilience.

- We call on our leaders to make health integral to climate policymaking at all levels of government, business and the social sector.

- We urge our leaders to support and adopt policies that strengthen commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, transition rapidly away from the use of coal, oil and natural gas, and transition to zero-carbon transportation systems.

- We must promote healthy, sustainable farms and food systems, and ensure that everyone has access to safe drinking water.

- Action taken now can and will help prevent the worst impacts of climate change, have a direct impact on our most vulnerable communities, and protect the health of all families. We cannot wait any longer.

Every day, I see the toll climate change is taking on the health, safety and well-being of my patients. The impacts are debilitating, from heat illness and worsening respiratory conditions like asthma or COPD, to declining mental health and insect-borne disease.

In my firsthand experience, I see the impact air pollution has on my mother who is 80 years old and has asthma. The current flu season in Perth has been severe, and puts in sharp relief the relative inadequacy of the Emergency Departments to cope with

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the additional drain on their resources to cope with even more respiratory patients who will become unwell because of the rise in air pollution due to climate change.

What's more, climate change poses an even greater threat to the health of all vulnerable populations, including pregnant women, children and the elderly.

As we continue to see the impacts of climate change, including worsening heat waves, wildfires, and air pollution, our already-urgent public health emergency will only become more serious. And the health sector cannot tackle it alone.

To respond, I am standing alongside other organizations, both overseas and in Australia, representing doctors, nurses, health systems, public health professionals and patients to call on our leaders in government, including the WA Health Department, as well as the business and the social sector, to immediately take steps and join Health Services in the UK and the US in declaring a Climate Emergency, that will limit climate disruption, build climate resilience, and protect health. Waiting to act is simply not an option.

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