

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The following information will not be published without your permission but enables the Inquiry to contact you about your submission if required.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

1. Establish current knowledge on the implications of climate change for health in Western Australia (WA) and recommend a framework for evaluating future implications

- Climate change is ultimately a major health threat because the effects of future climate projections represent an unacceptably high and potentially catastrophic risk to human health. Human health is dependent on the health of the planet and its ecosystems, therefore climate change poses a huge threat to humanity's wellbeing by affecting the building blocks for health, causing health inequalities and impacting the mental health of people living in fear of an unstable climate future.

- The World Health Organisation's COP24 Special Report on Climate Change and Health states that "Meeting the commitments of the Paris Agreement for mitigation would save millions of lives by the middle of the century" and The Climate and Health Alliance have outlined the risks to health from climate change. This includes the significant immediate and costly negative health impacts. The range of impacts which are already being felt and are predicted to worsen, as well as the groups most affected are listed below.

- Direct impacts on health:

- Increasing injury, physical and mental illness, and death related to a greater frequency of more intense weather events (floods, bushfires, droughts, cyclones and storms), as well as the effects of increasing temperatures and heatwaves.

- Physical displacement, mental health impacts and post-traumatic stress

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associated with extreme weather placing increased demand on health, emergency and community services.

- Extreme weather events leading to both increased pressure on healthcare services and facilities as well as damage to those facilities. This would reduce access and capacity to respond to people in need of those facilities.
- Physical and mental health risks associated with extreme weather events damaging other infrastructure that people depend on, including power dependent devices, transport routes, building structures, support services, and schools.
- Indirect impacts on health:
 - Air pollution and inhalant allergens causing respiratory diseases, including lung cancer.
 - Food and water security affected by reduced rainfall and drought posing a range of risks related to human health and wellbeing.
 - Reduced river flows leading to declining water quality, loss of aquatic biodiversity, and reductions in available water to support agriculture, threatening food security – all of which have flow on effects for human health.
 - Inequitable access to water exacerbating existing health inequalities, while declining water availability may impact water quality and reduce crop yields, leading to higher food prices and limiting food options.
 - Mental illness and stress related to economic and emotional pressures associated with increasingly frequent and severe climate change related disasters and/or a sense of despair and hopelessness related to inadequate societal responses to the threat of climate change. The latter could particularly affect those working in climate justice space.
 - Occupational health risks such as workplace injuries, heat induced discomfort, fatigue, and reduced alertness from temperature rise (particularly for outdoor workers, and those working in indoor non-cooled environments).
 - Damage to homes and properties and displacement experienced by people in low lying and coastal communities in the face of inundation associated with sea level rise, and from regional communities in the context of persistent drought, will bring a range of health challenges in the future, including mental illness.
 - Factors from changes in environmental systems, causing changes to the distribution of water- and food-borne infectious diseases, air pollution patterns, and the availability of safe drinking water and adequate nutrition.
 - Further health impacts relate to changes in economic, social and political systems, including migration of people, conflict over scarce resources as well as a

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possible decrease in welfare support.

- Who will be affected:
 - Climate change health impacts vary based on the vulnerability and adaptive capacity of individuals and populations.
 - Well recognised vulnerable groups include First Nations people, people of colour, women, LGBTI people, people living in poverty, people experiencing homelessness, people on a low income, people in insecure work and at risk/outdoor industries, people with disabilities, people of CALD backgrounds, newly arrived migrants and refugees, children, young people and older persons, people with existing health problems, people living in rural and remote areas, farmers, people living in climate risk areas, and emergency responders.
 - Climate change is an issue of intergenerational and international injustice. Future generations will suffer worse health impacts, and poorer countries are already suffering greater impacts despite being the least responsible for emissions.
 - In WA climate health is already impacting people on an intragenerational scale and impacts threaten to undermine the last half century of gains in development and global health.
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
7. Define the role of the Department of Health in leading public policy on climate change and health
- It is recommended that the Department of Health (The Department) undertake the following roles and key actions to protect the public from the harmful health impacts of climate change:
 - Establish and resource a Sustainable Development Unit based on the UK's model of the same name, as per the final recommendations of the Sustainable Health Review. Health sector sustainability to include reducing greenhouse gas emissions and waste in hospitals and health services, divestment and refusing sponsorship from fossil fuel companies.
 - With consideration of the health impacts, gain a regulatory role in setting WA emissions reduction targets and regulating high emitting industries. (A precedent was set by the health sector regulating substances such as asbestos, which also presented a significant public health risk.)
 - Call for a renewable energy target that will allow for a planned transition and a net-zero emissions target by at least 2050 with an interim target of at least 60% on

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2005 levels by 2030, in line with the science.

- Set a mandatory target for all health services to have net-zero emissions by at least 2050 with an interim target of at least 60% on 2005 levels by 2030, in line with the science.
- Consistent with the science and the need to rapidly reduce emissions, advocate for no further major fossil fuel developments in Western Australia.
- In conjunction with the health sector in general, lead a visible public process to draw the link between the climate crisis and health and articulate the need for immediate emissions reduction. This process could also include highlighting benefits of reducing emissions for other health issues such as air pollution-related heart and lung disease and obesity and leading the cultural shift away from (stigmatising) fossil fuels.
- Lead and coordinate a comprehensive adaptation process to prepare WA communities for current and future climate health impacts including extreme weather events, food price increase, social and economic disruption etc. This would need to focus on the most vulnerable communities. Measures which would assist include reliable information and resources, research into quantifying impacts and responses, human resources, coordinating responses etc.
- Liaise with the broader WA Government who are currently producing a whole-of-government climate change policy, as well the EPA who is currently consulting on guidelines to deal with emissions – to ensure the health of the community is protected.
- Consider ways in which actions taken in WA could inform/influence national thinking and actions on climate change.

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