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30 August 2019

Adj. Professor Tarun Weeramanthri  
Climate Health WA Inquiry  
Department of Health  
Public and Aboriginal Health Division  
Government of Western Australia  
PO Box 8172  
Perth Business Centre. WA 6849

Dear Prof Weeramanthri

**Regarding: invitation to provide a written submission to the Climate Health WA Inquiry**

Thank you for the invitation to provide a written submission to the Climate Health WA Inquiry. The scientific evidence clearly indicates that anthropogenic climate change, principally arising from the burning of fossil fuels presents a threat to the natural environment and to human health that is unprecedented in the range and magnitude of its consequences. The extent of the threat to human health and society is also well described in position statements released by health professional bodies including Australasian Medical Colleges and the Australian Medical Association. However, as reported in the *Lancet Countdown Report* for 2018, there has been little progress on reducing carbon emissions or building the adaptive capacity of health systems. Where transition to a low carbon economy has commenced it is not occurring at sufficient pace and scale. In light of this the WA Inquiry is a very welcome initiative.

I would like to endorse the comprehensive response to the Enquiry that the Climate and Health Alliance have presented and would like to highlight the following issues.

1. The health system is a significant contributor to the climate change problem. The Australian health system contributes about 7% of all Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of the emissions are related to the things the system purchases, like pharmaceuticals, and the care that is provided to patients, like some anaesthetic agents that have large carbon footprints. In addition the health system uses large amounts of fresh water, toxic chemicals and plastics, and produces immense amounts of a variety of waste products. The National Health System (NHS) in England led by the NHS Sustainable Development Unit has demonstrated that it is possible for the health sector to reduce its

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<sup>1</sup> A Malik, M Lenzen, S McAlister and F McGain (2018), The carbon footprint of Australian health care, The Lancet Planetary Health.2: e27-e35.

carbon and environmental footprint; the Western Australian and Australian health sector can follow this example.

2. The health system must be ready for the changing patterns of morbidity and mortality and ensure that the health workforce is skilled to both recognise and respond appropriately.
3. The health system must be prepared for the consequences of extreme weather events which can disrupt operations leaving populations vulnerable at critical times.
4. To secure the well-being of future generations a whole of government response is required, both within each jurisdiction and at a national level, to meet the challenge of climate change. WA Health must influence other WA government departments to similarly examine their portfolios and reduce their carbon and environmental footprints.

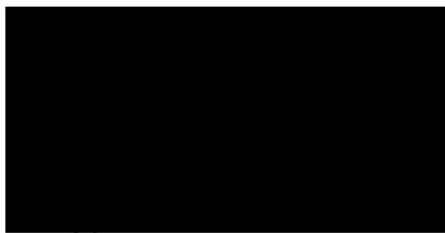
Consequently I recommend WA Health to develop a comprehensive strategy on climate change and health that tackles both the carbon emissions of the health system and the health system's preparedness for the effects of climate change on health and health services. This work would be facilitated by a unit within the Health Department to support the health sector achieve environmental sustainability.

I also recommend that the WA Health Minister encourage the Federal Government to establish an Environmentally Sustainable Health Services Unit to promote at a national level the development of health services that are environmentally sustainable and prepared for the effects of climate change on health and health services.

I also recommend a strong, coordinated whole of government response to climate change by the WA Government, both to mitigate and adapt, as an essential and significant contribution to the health of current and future generations of people in WA and Australia

Climate change is a health issue. We need to respond urgently and at scale to this threat. I commend the WA Health Minister for convening this Enquiry and look forward to the outcomes.

Yours sincerely



**Professor Lynne Madden**

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