

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The following information will not be published without your permission but enables the Inquiry to contact you about your submission if required.

First name	Peter
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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).

Dear Professor Weeramanthri,

I congratulate the WA government on establishing this inquiry and hope that it will lead to the development and implementation of a strong, persistent, well-resourced and effective climate and health strategy for WA.

I am confident that through your own investigations and/or the submissions of others you will be well aware of the copious evidence regarding the serious and imminent threats posed by climate change to human health, extending to existential threats to human civilisation and even the survival of the species, and the recommendations that others have made regarding the urgent actions needed within and beyond the health services. I am thinking of for, instance, the publications of the UNFCCC, WHO, Lancet Commission and Lancet Countdown, Climate and Health Alliance, Doctors for the Environment Australia, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Public Health Association of Australia, NHS Sustainable Development Unit and many other organisations and individuals here and overseas. I do not feel any need to go over this ground here but I do commend to you the framework for action that was developed in 2017 by a coalition of health organisations led by the Climate and Health Alliance. I do, however, wish to make several important points:

1. In my view the Inquiry should recommend that the WA Health Department adopt three overarching goals with respect to climate change:

1. rapidly reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of the WA health system so that the system becomes carbon neutral (as a shorthand for greenhouse gas neutral) by 2040 at the latest;

2. prepares itself for the existing and inevitably increasing effects of climate change on:

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1. the health of the people of WA. This includes changes in the patterns of illness and injuries that routinely present to health services as climate change increases and the outcomes of extreme weather events;

2. the ability of hospital and community-based health facilities and services to deliver the services the community requires when an extreme weather event occurs and damages the facilities and services themselves or the surrounding infrastructure (eg roads, sewage systems, fresh water supplies, power supplies, etc.). It is my impression that health services across Australia are currently ill-prepared for such events;

3. actively engage in the broader political and public climate change debate in WA and Australia and fully participate to the extent that it is able within its remit to policy discussions and decisions regarding the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions in WA and Australia.

2. Regarding point 1.3, it remains very poorly understood, even by health professionals, that climate change is not simply an environmental issue but also a health issue. The WA Health Department and services responsible to it have great knowledge and expertise in these issues and command considerable respect in the community. Active participation by the health services of WA in climate change issues could be extremely important in bringing about the major policy changes that are urgently needed to limit global warming to 1.5C, a level that will be much safer for health and the environment than 2C. Examples of actions that the WA Health could take include:

1. education of health professionals, the media, the public and politicians about the urgent and severe threats posed to human health by climate change, and the policies and actions required to reduce these threats;

2. advocating for mandatory health impact assessments (HIA) at an early stage of planning on all significant mining, energy, transport, agricultural, urban development etc. policies and developments, and ensuring that such HIAs includes consideration of (the currently mostly ignored) cumulative effects and that they are made public when finished;

3. conducting HIAs themselves wherever appropriate;

4. providing strong health input to significant planning proposals, proposed legislative changes, etc. that might have significant health effects, for instance regarding mining, energy, transport, agricultural, urban development etc.

5. emphasising the very clear links between fossil fuel combustion, air pollution and climate change;

6. publicly rejecting any sponsorship contracts, advertising or research

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funding from companies associated with the fossil fuel industry;

7. advocating for industry superannuation funds of which employees of WA Health may be members to divest completely from fossil fuel and associated companies.

3. All the work of WA Health on climate change should give particular attention to disadvantaged and vulnerable communities and where significant social, occupational or economic changes might be proposed for a region to a just transition for the communities affected.

4. I am immodestly including below references for three articles on climate change and health services of which you may not be aware:

1. Charlesworth K, Stewart G, Sainsbury P. Addressing the carbon footprint of health organisations: eight lessons for implementation. Public Health Research & Practice, December 2018; 28(4):22841830. <https://doi.org/10.17061/phrp2841830> .

2. Rychetnik L, Sainsbury P, Stewart G. How Local Health Districts can prepare for the effects of climate change: an adaptation model applied to metropolitan Sydney. Aust Health Review. Published online 21 December 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1071/AH18153> .

3. Sainsbury P, Charlesworth K, Madden L, Capon A, Stewart G, Pencheon D. Climate change is a health issue: what can doctors do? International Medical Journal. 2019;49:1044-48. <https://doi:10.1111/imj.14380> .

Many thanks for inviting me to make a submission. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information. I would be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of this submission.

I have no objection to my submission being made public if that is what you propose.

Your sincerely,
Peter Sainsbury



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