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## From the President

29 August 2019

Adjunct Professor Tarun Weeramanthri FRACP FAFPHM  
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Via email: [climatehealthwa@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:climatehealthwa@health.wa.gov.au)

Dear Adjunct Professor Weeramanthri

### **Climate Health WA Inquiry**

Thank you for the invitation to the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine (AFPHM) to provide a written submission to the Climate Health WA Inquiry (the Inquiry).

As you know, AFPHM is a Faculty of The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP). It provides training and continuing education for Public Health Medicine Fellows and trainees.

The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of 17,000 physicians and 8,000 trainee physicians, across Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, including over 1,250 physicians and 550 trainee physicians in Western Australia (WA). The RACP represents a broad range of medical specialities including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine, and addiction medicine.

Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients.

The RACP recognises the impact that climate change is already having on health and is part of a growing network of health organisations calling for action. Given the threat unchecked climate change poses to health, climate health action is a policy and advocacy priority for the RACP.

We commend the WA Department of Health's Inquiry into the health impacts of climate change in WA. We support the establishment of a knowledge-base on the climate health impacts on WA as well as a program of work to support adaptation and mitigation. We also commend the work the WA Government has already completed through the [Climate and Sustainability Forum Working Group Report](#) (CSFWG Report) done as part of its Sustainable Health Review.

The RACP has position statements on [Climate Change and Health](#), [Environmentally Sustainable Healthcare Position Statement](#) and the [Health Benefits Mitigating Climate Change](#). Further, as part of our 2019 Federal election advocacy campaign (“Future-proofing the healthcare system”), we developed a [factsheet](#) to highlight the carbon footprint of the health sector, the human health impacts of climate change and the benefits of adaptation and mitigation.

The RACP Climate Change and Health Position Statement recognises the importance of implementing a national climate change and health strategy. In June 2017 the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) developed a [Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-Being for Australia](#). This strategy focusses on the Commonwealth; however, its vision, principles and policy action areas are relevant to the WA Government.

Further, our Climate Change and Health Position Statement highlights that climate change contributes to health inequities. This includes the disproportionate effect of climate change on Indigenous people in Australia as acknowledged in the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility’s (NCCARF) [report on Indigenous climate change adaptation in the Kimberley region of North-Western Australia](#).

NCCARF’s report was based on three case studies in Kununurra community in the Keep River district (WA/Northern Territory) and Warmun community and Bidyadanga community (both in WA). Furthering this work in addressing climate adaptation in collaboration with the communities it will directly impact would be a valuable contribution from WA in informing the national agenda.

Our Climate Change and Health Position Statement also notes the impacts of water, food and vector-borne disease and severe climate events. However, as noted in the CSFWG Report, there is a lack of data on these impacts in terms of how these are experienced and their costs to health and healthcare in WA. We support the establishment of a knowledge-base specific to WA to form a foundation to develop appropriate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

In our Environmentally Sustainable Healthcare Position Statement we recommend the establishment of Healthcare Sustainability Units at national, state or regional levels. We have identified that the initial tasks of such units would be to consult stakeholders, measure the carbon footprint of health services in their jurisdiction, work with health stakeholders to develop an environmental sustainability strategy and support health services in their jurisdiction to implement the strategy.

Our position statement on The Health Benefits of Mitigating Climate Change outlines strategies and associated health benefits relating to reducing fossil fuel combustion and extraction, decreasing food and agriculture emissions and improving the energy efficiency of homes. The position statement calls upon all Australian and New Zealand governments, including state governments to increase public and active transport use through urban planning and to require independent Health Impact Assessments for all new fossil fuel extraction projects. While the recommendations are not specific to WA, they translate well to a WA context and have been identified as areas for action in the CSFWG Report.

The RACP plans to continue our work in climate change through a collaborative project with other interested medical colleges. The project will likely include a report which reviews and analyses the potential impacts of climate change on Australian healthcare systems, and their capacity to continue to provide high quality care. We anticipate that the planned report will

touch on areas within the scope of this Inquiry. If the Inquiry is still in progress once the report is completed, we will send through a copy.

Should you require any further information about this matter, please contact Ekta Sharma, Policy and Advocacy Officer on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely



Associate Professor Mark Lane  
RACP President



Associate Professor Linda Selvey  
AFPHM President