



Health groups put climate first in election poll

Media release

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The health community in Australia is calling for strong action on climate change as the prescription for political parties looking for a winning formula in the upcoming federal election. The electorate is becoming more aware of the growing risks to the wellbeing, safety and health of communities around Australia.

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), a national coalition of health groups, representing over 300,000 doctors, nurses, midwives, social workers, psychologists, physiotherapists, allied health professionals and health care consumers, has launched its policy platform this week, outlining the priorities of health groups for effective climate action to protect health.

Leading experts such as Professor Tony McMichael from Australian National University have joined the call, saying climate change should be the key health issue in this election.

"Climate change and its threats to human health, survival and social stability should be at the top of the election agenda," Professor McMichael, a population health specialist, said. "Further, Australia has responsibilities not only for its own population, but for vulnerable communities elsewhere."

Emissions reduction targets of 50% by 2020, alongside the now strengthening commitments of other emitting nations, are needed to reduce the profound risks to health from climate change, the Climate and Health Alliance said, along with a national strategy on climate and health.

CAHA President Dr Liz Hanna said: "The health sector is already under pressure, and increasing heatwaves, fires, floods and storms will place even greater demand on frontline and community health services as people struggle with associated injuries, illnesses and trauma. The long recovery period from these events is often under estimated, as the toll upon human health and local economies linger for years."

Public Health Association of Australia CEO Michael Moore said: "Climate change already poses serious risks to the health of people in Australia and globally. It is incumbent upon Australia, as a wealthy developed country, to have a nationally coordinated approach to responding to the health risks from climate change."

The Climate and Health Alliance is calling for Australia to commit to the major emissions reductions now urgently required by developed nations in order to avoid the globally agreed 'safe' maximum of a two degrees Celsius increase.

A national strategy is a key issue, health groups say, as is the establishment of a sustainable healthcare unit within the Department of Health and Ageing to help drive the health sector's transition to low carbon operations.

Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) Chief Executive Alison Verhoeven said: "The health sector has an important role to play in terms of responding to changing demand patterns arising from climate change but also by improving the sector's sustainability relating to emissions, energy production and waste management. This can not only deliver significant financial savings, but also support improvements in health status of staff and the community."

For more information about the Climate and Health Alliance federal election 2013 policy platform, visit: <http://caha.org.au/campaigns/federal-election-2013/>

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