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Pre-Budget Submission

Implementing an Effective Health and Climate Strategy

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Acknowledgement

The Climate and Health Alliance recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and acknowledge that sovereignty of the land we call Australia has never been ceded. We commit to listening to and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about how we can better reflect Indigenous ways of being and knowing in our work.

About CAHA

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is a national charity and the peak body on climate change and health in Australia. CAHA is an alliance of organisations within the health sector working together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions.

The membership of CAHA includes a broad cross-section of health sector stakeholders with over 100 member organisations, representing healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as healthcare service providers, institutions, academics, researchers, and consumers.

Preamble

Climate and health issues are serious and growing. The recent floods have devastated communities and caused extensive damage. The shift from La Niña to El Niño weather patterns will likely see a return of very high temperatures in parts of Australia, along with risks of fire and flooding. These impacts are felt very strongly by remote and rural communities, and further impede the ability of Indigenous communities to live on, and care for, Country. Climate change directly impacts human health, and increases both demand for health services and the stress on the people and institutions providing those services. Action on climate and health is hugely beneficial in economic, social, environmental, and cultural terms.

Background

On 8 November 2022, Assistant Minister Kearney made the following statement on behalf of the Government.

“The Albanese Government has committed \$3.4 million in its 2022-23 Federal Budget to fund Australia’s first National Health and Climate Strategy and a National Health Sustainability and Climate Unit to better prepare the health system for the challenges of climate change.

With more frequent and severe weather events, extreme temperatures and poor air quality, climate change presents a serious physical and mental health challenge for Australians. The World Health Organization has described climate change as the greatest threat to global health this century.

With unique and far-reaching health and wellbeing challenges already occurring in Australia, it is essential that we are better prepared for future implications.

The new unit will be located within the Department of Health and Aged Care and will work to ensure all Australians have access to a health system that can identify and adapt to the challenges presented by climate change. This could include increased demand for services or an increase in specific conditions arising from environmental changes.

The unit will also be tasked with leading national efforts to reduce emissions in the health sector, which contributes approximately 7% to Australia’s emissions.

It is expected that Australia will see more deaths and injury from extreme weather events, the increased spread of vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever and Japanese encephalitis, more instances [of] food and water insecurity, and a greater toll on our mental health.

The Strategy will be developed in consultation with states and territories, peak bodies and other non-government organisations.”

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), in consultation with other stakeholders, strongly supports these commitments which reflect the widely endorsed [Healthy, Regenerative and Just policy framework](#), as well as [key recommendations from the Better Healthier Futures Roundtable](#) held in September 2022. The \$3.4 million is a multi-year commitment and will need to increase significantly if this work is to deliver the impact on climate and health that science indicates is necessary and Australia deserves.

CAHA understands that a significant part of this initial budget was sourced from existing resources from the Department of Health and Aged Care, rather than new and additional funding. The Health and Climate Strategy will not be final before budget decisions are made, but resources can be allocated in the current budget to ensure implementation is not needlessly delayed. The immediate priority is to properly resource the work of the National Health Sustainability and Climate Unit, and fund key implementation measures for the Health and Climate Strategy. This submission focusses on these key steps.

Resourcing the National Health Sustainability and Climate Unit

Activity	Proposed Amount	Start Date	Status
Baseline Funding	\$1,000,000 pa	1 July 2023	Ongoing

Effective implementation of a National Health and Climate Strategy will require that the NHSCU has the capacity to lead and integrate work across a range of sectors. We recognise that developing capacity and capability takes time and resources. A significant amount of work can be delivered by funding collaborative action with the health sector while this is occurring.

We recommend that the baseline budget for the NHSCU is increased to \$1 million per annum from 1 July 2023 onwards and that this resourcing is in addition to commitments towards specific initiatives listed below. The initiatives listed below will require leadership and coordination through the NHSCU, and ongoing collaboration with the wider sector.

Developing and Implementing an Effective Health and Climate Strategy

Activity	Proposed Amount	Start Date	Status
National Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment and Monitoring	\$1,000,000 pa	1 July 2023	Ongoing
Incorporate climate and health into the Wellbeing Framework	\$100,000 pa	1 July 2023	Ongoing
Support and enable a "whole of government" response to the Health and Climate Strategy	\$250,000 pa	1 July 2023	Ongoing
Support sustainable, resilient, low emissions health care	\$500,000	1 July 2023	One off
	\$675,000 pa	1 July 2023	Ongoing
International action on climate and health	\$500,000 pa	1 July 2023	Ongoing

Contingency Fund for integrating health and climate action into key portfolio areas	\$500,000,000 Fund	1 July 2023	Reviewable
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Preamble

A number of initiatives are under consideration by DHAC in the current (2022/23) financial year. These will support development of an initial Health and Climate Strategy. These include:

- mapping existing initiatives across government against key policy objectives and areas of work relevant to climate and health
- extensive sectorial and public consultation on a draft strategy to inform final decisions on an initial strategy
- workshops with interdisciplinary experts, stakeholders and policymakers from all jurisdictions to respond to the mapping exercise and provide guidance on the national strategy's objectives and targets, implementation actions, timeline for achievements, and processes for monitoring.

By themselves these initiatives will create the framework for an initial climate and health strategy. The refinement and long-term implementation of this strategy will require institutional support and ongoing investment in collaboration, data gathering and planning.

National Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment

Central to delivering ongoing benefits will be an accurate assessment of vulnerability and capacity, as well as investing in systems to monitor and evaluate climate and health impacts in real time. We recommend a triennial review of vulnerability and capacity and real time data collection, with the first of these undertaken in fiscal year 2023/24.

We recommend that \$1,000,000 per annum is allocated to fund this work.

Incorporate Climate and Health into the Wellbeing Framework

The framework for reporting on wellbeing, and assessing wellbeing, needs to include a climate and health component. Such an approach will help tie together the Vulnerability and Capacity assessments and policy evaluation from a Wellbeing perspective.

We have submitted separately on the Framework itself. This proposal reflects the fact that the recommendation we make in relation to the Framework will require additional funding.

We recommend that funding for implementation of the Wellbeing Framework includes \$100,000 per annum specifically tagged to monitoring and assessing climate and health impacts of measures evaluated through the framework.

Support and enable a “whole of government” response to the Health and Climate Strategy

Implementing a health and climate strategy will require specific measures to develop the broader institutional infrastructure and collaborative environment at the institutional level to deliver on the strategies intentions. CAHA recommends that:

- The Government provides adequate resourcing to the National Health Sustainability and Climate Unit (NHSCU) to allow for additional staffing and coordination of activities below related to National Health and Climate Strategy implementation (see earlier section Resourcing the National Health Sustainability and Climate Unit)
- The Government establish a National Health and Climate Change Ministerial Forum / Committee, on climate and health. A National Committee of Health and Climate Change Ministers (or related portfolios) led by the Commonwealth, including states and territories, would provide oversight of the development and implementation of the national strategy.

We recommend \$125,000 per annum is allocated to this work.

- The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) establishes a standing climate and health committee on climate and health as a priority to provide advice to the Joint Climate and Health Ministerial Committee and the Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council.

We recommend \$125,000 per annum is allocated to this work.

Support sustainable, resilient, low emissions health care

Health accounts for 7% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. The health sector has the capacity to provide leadership by example around emissions reductions. There are numerous success stories at the level of individual institutions. What is needed is the resourcing, collaboration and support to deliver a transformational whole-of-system response.

We recommend the following steps to deliver a scaled-up response within the health system, as envisaged by the National Health and Climate Strategy:

Develop a National Healthcare Decarbonisation Roadmap.

We propose the Commonwealth works with the states and territories to develop a national decarbonisation roadmap for the health sector to reach net zero emissions by 2035. This should encompass 5-yearly goals and be informed by research, evidence and case studies, including from the National Health Service (NHS) in England, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals network.

We recommend \$500,000 is invested initially with \$100,000 per annum for maintenance and updating is allocated to this activity.

Establish an annual Ministerial Health Leadership Roundtable on Climate Action.

We propose this initiative becomes an annual event to bring together federal, state, and territory Health Ministers and senior officials. Participants can learn from others in the ATACH program being coordinated by WHO, as well as international and national experts, and share each jurisdiction's progress and challenges in this area of work. This will provide opportunities to explore collaboration across the jurisdictions and to identify best practice policy and practice at the intersection of climate change and health. The forum should meet at least annually, and include presentations by experts to highlight success stories and challenges.

We recommend \$75,000 per annum is allocated to this activity.

Establish a national and regional Community of Practice on climate change and health.

A Community of Practice will include policymakers from federal, state and territory governments, practitioners, researchers, and NGOs, and relevant stakeholders. It must involve capacity development and close engagement with stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific.

Such a community would provide a regular forum to share progress on tackling climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and healthcare decarbonisation, and allow for the sharing of knowledge, experience, and progress. In this sense it is the ongoing working complement to the Ministerial Forum.

We propose that this Community of Practice engage with Australia's Indo-Pacific neighbours. This will help develop the evidence-base for climate action within the Indo-Pacific region in the lead up to Australia hosting a conference of the parties (COP) of the UNFCCC.

We recommend \$500,000 per annum is allocated to developing and supporting a Community of Practice.

International Action

Commit to an Australian climate and health presence at all future Conferences of the Parties (COPs)

We propose that the Government commit to send a health delegation to all future COPs, with a commitment to participate actively in the WHO's climate and health Pavilion, and to support Indigenous voices to articulate climate and health issues at this global forum. As the impacts of climate change are felt more intensively around the world, the presence of health voices at COP is growing. The health and climate strategy presents a strong opportunity for Australia to build a positive international reputation in this area of climate policy.

We recommend funding of \$250,000 per annum to support this ongoing work.

Join the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACH)

ATACH is a coalition of 60+ governments that are committed to healthcare resilience and decarbonisation. Already, CAHA has secured interest and engagement with this type of commitment from some State and Territory Governments. Joining ATACH would focus and anchor Australia's national and sub-national commitments to the ongoing international efforts in this area.

We recommend a commitment of \$250,000 per annum to support ongoing engagement with international partners through the ATACH initiative.

Integrate Health and Climate Action into key portfolio areas

CAHA has invested considerable time and energy since its inception in identifying and assessing the need for climate and health action across a range of policy areas and portfolios. The [Healthy, Regenerative and Just framework for a national strategy on climate, health and wellbeing for Australia](#), was developed by the health sector and experts. It provides a comprehensive roadmap to support the Commonwealth Government in taking a leadership role in protecting the health and well-being of Australian communities from climate change and in fulfilling Australia's international obligations, including under the Paris Agreement.

Without pre-empting the national strategy findings, we believe the Government needs to allocate additional funds to address what are already well-known climate and health issues in key portfolio areas. We are confident that such pre-emptive commitments will be supported by the evidence brought to bear as part of developing a National Health and Climate Strategy.

We recommend that a contingency fund of \$500,000,000 is established in this budget to address urgent climate and health work emerging from the National Health and Climate Strategy - and from the impacts of climate change - in fiscal year 2023/24.

Possible areas of action are shown below. The evidence to support urgent action in these areas is already strong. We recommend that the Government gives itself the capacity to allocate resources to emerging priorities within these areas in fiscal year 2023/24. The alternative is to artificially impose a 12-15 month delay by waiting till the following budget cycle.

Emergency and Disaster-preparedness

- support the identification of vulnerable populations and gaps in policies and procedures, including in emergency services, in order to adequately prepare for the impacts of climate change.
- finance community preparedness and disaster recovery.
- support all healthcare systems to undertake vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCAs), including in rural and remote communities.
- finance health sector resilience activity on the basis of VCAs

Education, Communication and Capacity Building

- support a public education campaign on the health impacts of climate change.
- equip health professionals with information, training and resources to respond to the next health disaster.
- embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and leadership in all climate health policy and action.

Research and Data for a Health-led Recovery

- support Australia's health and climate research capacity to evaluate specific health threats, priority needs, to design responses and to monitor trends and opportunities for maximising multi-sector benefits.
- establish a dedicated health resilience research fund to support innovation and evidence-based action.
- harness the expertise of the Australian research community.

Health Promotion and Prevention

- shift finance and investment towards initiatives that build resilience from shocks and stresses, strengthen the economy, and promote health. In all policy efforts, a health lens should be applied i.e. a "Health in All Policies" approach that evaluates potential for health and climate benefits and health harms.

- The Health in All Policies approach should be adopted in all health-determining sectors: energy, transport, agriculture, buildings and urban development.

Supporting Healthy and Resilient Communities

- enhance the capacities and capability of communities to anticipate their climate risks and reduce impacts on health and wellbeing in their communities
- strengthen community resilience and empower communities and community service organisations to respond and build resilience to health threats
- ensure adequate investment systems, regulations, processes, training and technology to deliver climate-resilient housing in a way that strengthens communities

Thriving Ecosystems

- restore and safeguard Australia's ecosystems and natural environments., recognising that intact ecosystems are the fundamental basis of human health and livelihoods.
- enable and empower First Nations Peoples to take the lead in preserving and restoring the natural environment.

Summary

CAHA recommends that the Commonwealth Government allocate resources in this budget to enable effective and timely implementation of the Health and Climate Strategy in the 2023/24 Fiscal Year. These resourcing decisions will need to be made prior to the completion of the Strategy.

CAHA and its collaborators have developed and collated a significant body of evidence. The Government has indicated a clear high-level direction for the Health and Climate Strategy. Together these suggest that the following measures can, and should be supported without delay.

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