

Australian chronic disease alliance welcomes new government strategy to reduce the impact of climate change on health

6 December 2023

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) has welcomed the new [National Health and Climate Strategy](#) launched at the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Dubai (COP28) by the Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, Ged Kearney MP.

“We congratulate the Government on this important new National Health and Climate Strategy. Australia’s health community has long advocated for a Strategy that takes seriously the threats of climate change to people’s health. This Strategy represents a commitment to do that,” said ACDPA Executive Officer Lucy Westerman, who, together with ACDPA members and other public health experts, participated in consultations which helped inform the Strategy’s development during 2023.

“Australia is now better positioned to protect the health of current and future generations, at home and abroad, with the new Strategy setting out priorities for focused and coordinated efforts to mitigate, adapt, and build resilience to climate change hazards,” said Ms Westerman.

Our health and the environment are inextricably linked. Bodies depend on clean air to breathe water to drink, safe and appropriate foods to be nourished, and a steady and stable temperature to function. Hazards arising from changes to our environment can harm our health; for example, air pollution from bush fire smoke and vehicle emissions exacerbates the risk of respiratory, neurological and heart diseases, and severe weather events such as heatwaves and floods compromise the availability of nutritious food and medicine supplies and cause mental and physical distress, in turn increasing the risk of other chronic conditions including stroke, diabetes and cancers.

That’s just the tip of the iceberg.

The Strategy emphasises the health sector’s role in taking steps to mitigate, adapt and build resilience to climate change, including optimising treatment and care, more sustainable procurement, and reducing its own emissions and waste throughout the health system.

People living with chronic conditions, including respiratory and heart diseases, chronic kidney disease and mental health conditions, are identified in the Strategy as among those at particular risk of harm during bushfires, heatwaves, or floods. People living with chronic conditions such as these, diabetes, and cancer, can be more susceptible to heat, pollution and other climate hazards, including disruption and complications in the care and treatment.

“Reducing the impact of changes to the climate is essential to improve health outcomes for people living with chronic conditions and who are otherwise highly vulnerable,” said Chris Forbes, ACDPA Chair and Kidney Health Australia CEO, “This strategy complements other efforts to reduce the burden of chronic diseases among Australians and improve people’s quality of life.”

ACDPA applauds the Strategy’s attention to prevention and links to the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030, noting that vulnerabilities from harms arising from climate change can be avoided or ameliorated by preventing disease as much as possible and detecting and managing disease early and well so to reduce progression and complications, and thus minimise health system demands. Notably, the Strategy identifies other protective and risk factors for chronic diseases, such as food and physical activity, and determinants, such as commercial and social, including business practices and housing and education, as priority areas for cross-sectoral action.

“Many ways we can reduce the hazards and harms of climate change exist outside of the remit of the health sector, so we are particularly pleased with the Strategy underpinned by a Health-in-All-Policies approach. We look forward to the Strategy engaging and mobilising diverse stakeholders to realise the considerable co-benefits of action to mitigate climate change beyond health,” said Ms Westerman.

ACDPA also welcomes the Government’s commitment through the Strategy to partnering with First Nations people and organisations, engaging with communities, and collaborating internationally on actions and commitments to protect all people and the planet.

“The new National Health and Climate Strategy is a game changer. A true whole-of-government-approach will help accelerate efforts to reduce the health and social impacts of climate change for people living in Australia and internationally; with renewed optimism, ACDPA’s members look forward to supporting the government with the Strategy’s implementation,” concluded Ms Westerman.

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About ACDPA

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) brings together Diabetes Australia; Cancer Council Australia; the National Heart Foundation of Australia; Kidney Health Australia; the Stroke Foundation and the Lung Foundation. These leading non-government health organisations share a commitment to reducing the burden of chronic disease attributable to modifiable risk factors and delayed detection. ACDPA members work together to support primary and secondary prevention of chronic diseases, focussing on chronic disease risk factors and determinants to reduce preventable illness and promoting health checks to help people understand, manage, and reduce disease risk as early as possible. www.acdpa.org.au / @ACDPAlliance

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