

1 October 2024

Joint Statement

Working together to achieve sustainable high-quality health care in a changing climate

Climate change and more frequent and intense extreme weather events pose profound and urgent challenges for the physical and mental health of people in Australia.

While Australia has one of the best healthcare systems in the world, it is estimated the health system is responsible, either directly or indirectly, for 5% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.¹

Clinical care contributes more than half of the greenhouse gas emissions produced by health systems. Greening our hospitals' energy and transport is not enough to reduce these emissions. We need to develop low-emission, climate-resilient and culturally safe models of care that deliver on the three principles of sustainable health care:

1. Investing in prevention, to improve health while reducing healthcare demand and associated emissions
2. Minimising potentially harmful and wasteful care, which accounts for around 30% of the emissions footprint of clinical care²
3. Minimising emissions associated with the delivery of high-value care.

Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been the traditional custodians of the land for thousands of years, we need to embed this knowledge and experience when addressing the health impacts of a changing climate.^{1,3}

Actions to address the health impacts of climate change must also take a health equity approach, because some groups, such as rural and remote communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are at a disproportionately increased risk of adverse health impacts from climate change due to existing inequities.¹

Australia's first [National Health and Climate Strategy](#), released in December 2023, sets out a whole-of-government plan to address the health impacts of climate change while reducing the health system's significant contribution to the emissions footprint.

The Strategy recognises that Australian medical colleges have important responsibilities in shaping clinical care delivery and in educating and training doctors. Medical colleges play a critical role in preparing the next generation of clinical leaders to practise culturally safe, sustainable medicine in a changing climate.

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission), the interim Australian Centre for Disease Control (interim CDC) and Australian medical colleges have agreed to work together to develop a framework for action on climate and health including meaningful and demonstrable actions to:

- Develop low-emissions models of care, including actions to improve care, minimise wasteful health care and involve patients in decisions about appropriate care
- Mobilise and support the health workforce to lead the health system response to climate change.

The Commission, the interim CDC and Australian medical colleges are committed to supporting clinicians to deliver high-value care that protects and promotes health in a changing climate. This includes training and supporting clinicians, particularly junior doctors, to request only appropriate tests and treatments and prescribe medicines safely and appropriately. We also recognise that clinicians have a role in advocating for sustainability and supporting communities to move to a clean energy future in an equitable way.

Work to minimise wasteful health care will not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it will improve patient care, decrease harms from overdiagnosis and overtreatment, minimise the physical and mental health impacts of climate change, and prioritise care for people who need it the most.



**Conjoint Professor
Anne Duggan**
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Commission on
Safety and Quality in Health Care



Professor Paul Kelly
Chief Medical Officer
Head, Interim Australian
Centre for Disease Control



**Associate Professor
Sanjay Jeganathan**
Chair, Council of Presidents
of Medical Colleges

Who we are

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care leads and coordinates key improvements in safety and quality in health care across Australia. The Commission has drafted a framework of actions that health services can use to improve the safety and quality of care while addressing the health impacts of climate change and health care's contribution to climate change. The framework is called the [Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Healthcare Module](#).

The interim Australian Centre for Disease Control is working to ensure the Health and Aged Care sector can reduce its emissions and adapt to the challenges presented by climate change.

Australian medical colleges have responsibilities to train, educate and provide professional development to doctors, and to support doctors to practise in a changing climate. They have roles in research and public leadership in climate action to protect and promote human health and well being.

1. Department of Health and Aged Care. The National Health and Climate Strategy. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023.
2. Barratt AL, Bell KJ, Charlesworth K, McGain F. High value health care is low carbon health care. *Med J Aust.* 2022. 216: 67-68. <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51331>
3. HEAL Network & CRE-STRIDE 2021, Climate Change and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Discussion Paper. Lowitja Institute, Melbourne. 2021.

Endorsing organisations

The Joint Statement: *Working together to achieve sustainable high-quality health care in a changing climate*

