

Surgeons join Call for Action against climate change

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has joined OraTaio: The New Zealand Climate and Health Council's Joint Call for Action as it moves to reduce the impact that surgical practice has on the environment.

The Joint Call for Action is already supported by 18 of New Zealand's most prestigious health professional organisations.

Dr Mark Smith, a Dunedin surgeon and OraTaiao Executive Board member, said that RACS support for the Call to Action marks a turning point in medical professional concern about climate change and health. "Tens of thousands of doctors, nurses, midwives, public health workers and medical students as well as the leaders of our university health training programmes are now united in a shared call for the government to rapidly transition to net zero carbon future. The health sector must also be enabled to lead on both reducing its own emissions and adapting to locked in changes," says Dr Smith.

Dr Cathy Ferguson, Vice President of RACS and a Wellington based Otolaryngology Head and Neck surgeon, said that the work of OraTaiao was crucially important to ensuring that a future where healthy people live in a healthy climate is achieved.

"Climate change has emerged as one of the most significant threats to health in the 21st century. Without urgent action, the consequences of our changing climate will have a devastating impact on health worldwide."

As described in a recent [Royal Society of New Zealand report](#), the ill-effects of climate change include the greater proliferation of vector borne diseases, an increase in events such as flooding and heatwaves, crop failures and salination of water supplies. Rising sea levels and an increase in extreme weather events will be particularly devastating for our Pacific neighbours.

"The health sector is a significant contributor to emissions in both New Zealand and Australia (estimated at 5-10% of total national emissions). As leaders in the operating theatre, surgeons have a responsibility to limit the impact that the practice of surgery has on the environment. Alongside supporting OraTaiao's Call to Action, RACS is developing resources to help surgeons reduce the carbon footprint of their own operating theatres."

Taking action on climate change can also reduce the burden of ill-health from leading causes of death in New Zealand such as cardiovascular disease, cancers, obesity and diabetes, with large cost savings to the health sector. The direct and indirect benefits from increased efficiencies in the health sector and improved population health would help offset any early costs of addressing climate change.

"RACS is committed to rapid and effective action on climate change and recognises human-caused climate change as an increasingly serious and urgent threat to health and health equity.

"It is important to demonstrate leadership in areas of emissions reduction, and to promote effective and fair global action to reduce emissions," said Dr Ferguson.

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About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

www.surgeons.org

OraTaiao: The New Zealand Climate and Health Council

OraTaiao is an incorporated society of over 500 health professionals calling for urgent and fair climate action. We know that climate changes fundamentally threaten human health and wellbeing – and that well-designed climate action can mean greater health and fairness now and in the longer term. Within its membership, OraTaiao has some of the world's leading climate-health experts. We link with international climate-health organisations internationally, plus other New Zealand health groups. See more at www.orataiao.org.nz/

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