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***The Lancet*: Landmark new medical research highlights opportunities for better health from strong climate action**

Launch by Nobel Laureate Professor Peter Doherty at University of Melbourne

****Embargo: 00:01 [UK time] Tuesday 23 June, 2015****

The threat to human health from climate change is so great that it could undermine the last fifty years of gains in development and global health, according to a major new Commission, published in ***The Lancet***.

However, the landmark report, to be launched by Nobel Laureate Professor Peter Doherty in Melbourne on Tuesday, provides comprehensive new evidence showing responses to mitigate and adapt to climate change have significant direct and indirect positive health benefits – from reducing air pollution to improving diet – making concerted efforts to tackle climate change one of the greatest opportunities to improve global health this century.

As Professor Doherty explains, “the Lancet Commission is timely as it provides a blueprint for a confident and evidence-based response to climate change, which will assist in protecting health from the impacts of climate change as well as harvest enormous health benefits made possible from the implementation of low carbon initiatives across a range of sectors.”

The potentially catastrophic risk to human health posed by climate change has been underestimated, say the authors, and while the technologies and finance required to address the problem can be made available, global political will to implement them is lacking.

According to Commission Co-Chair Professor Anthony Costello, Director of the University College London (UCL) Institute for Global Health, UK, “Climate change has the potential to reverse the health gains from economic development that have been made in recent decades – not just through the direct effects on health from a changing and more unstable climate, but through indirect means such as increased migration and reduced social stability. However, our analysis clearly shows that by tackling

climate change, we can also benefit health, and tackling climate change in fact represents one of the greatest opportunities to benefit human health for generations to come.”*

The report shows that the direct health impacts of climate change come from the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, especially heat waves, floods, droughts and storms. Indirect impacts come from changes in infectious disease patterns, air pollution, food insecurity and malnutrition, involuntary migration, displacement and conflicts.

The report also provides a clear set of recommendations for policymakers to enable an effective response to climate change that protects and promote human health. These strategies will reduce pressures on national health budgets and deliver large cost savings, facilitating investments in stronger, more resilient health systems.

There are numerous ways in which action on climate change brings immediate health gains – avoiding the burning of fossil fuels reduces respiratory diseases, and active transport (walking and cycling) cut pollution and road traffic accidents, and reduces rates of obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke. There are also health benefits from changes to diet which might arise from a concerted effort to tackle climate change, such as eating less red meat.

Leading health and medical groups in Australia have welcomed the series, which represents a major new collaboration between climate scientists and geographers, social and environmental scientists, biodiversity experts, engineers and energy policy experts, economists, political scientists and public policy experts, and health professionals.

The Commission will be launched by Nobel Laureate Professor Peter Doherty at a forum at the University of Melbourne on Tuesday 23rd June 2015.

Co-hosted by the Nossal Institute for Global Health, Australian Medical Association (Vic), Public Health Association of Australia (Vic), the Australian Medical Students Association, the Climate and Health Alliance and the Melbourne Sustainable Societies Institute, the 2015 Lancet Commissions forum **“Climate Change: The greatest health threat or health opportunity?”** will feature a keynote address by Professor Doherty, a videolink to Commission Co-Chair Professor Hugh Montgomery, and presentations by Professor Billie Giles-Corti and Associate Professor Grant Blashki.

Associate Professor Grant Blashki from the Nossal Institute of Global Health, University of Melbourne said: “The good news is that the low carbon transformation taking place around the world is good for health, and we can now see clearly that investing our energies in this transition will deliver better health as well as economic savings.”

“This extraordinarily important series offers guidance to policymakers, politicians, financial investors, international negotiators, health and medical professionals, the urban planning, energy and transport sectors, educators and the general public.

“Our climate-smart, healthy future, starts here,” Associate Professor Blashki said.

The Melbourne launch of the 2015 Lancet Commissions will be held at 6pm, Tuesday 23rd June at the Auditorium, Ground Floor, Peter Doherty Institute, 792 Elizabeth St, Melbourne.

NOTES TO EDITORS

* Quotes direct from authors and cannot be found in text of Commission

For interviews, please contact James Lorenz at Holdfast Communications on 0400 376 021 or james@holdfastcommunications.com.au

For full Commission, see: <http://press.thelancet.com/ClimateCommission.pdf>

For additional media materials, including infographic images and video, see <http://climatehealthcommission.org/>

Dr Tony Bartone, President, Australian Medical Association (Victoria)

“Human health is ultimately dependent on the health of the planet and its ecosystem. Climate change represents a serious threat to human health and requires urgent action. AMA supports research, education, prevention, monitoring, and assessment relating to the public health issues that may arise from climate change. This new research will support health authorities and governments to plan and allocate resources to deal with the changing disease patterns associated with climate change.”

Mr James Lawler, President, Australian Medical Student’s Association

“As the body representing Australia’s future doctors, AMSA is very concerned about climate change. The world could look very different by the time we reach the peak of our careers. However, while climate change is a great threat to health, tackling climate change also presents a terrific opportunity.”

Dr Liz Hanna, President, Climate and Health Alliance

“This extremely important series highlights the urgent need for governments, the community and business to acknowledge the serious and increasing risks to human health by failing to reduce emissions. At the same time, the report demonstrates that by implementing strategies to cut emissions right now, we can realise immediate and substantial benefits to health and wellbeing, which in many cases can realise financial savings that exceed the costs of mitigation.”

Michael Moore, Chief Executive Officer, Public Health Association of Australia

“Global environmental change, including global warming, is a threat to our population's health. Australia's national policies exist in a global context and must recognise the direct and indirect effects on health that occur with climate change. We won't get a second chance when it comes to tackling climate change and public health. For the future sake of our planet and the health of the world's population, we must look beyond short term interests.”