



CLIMATE AND
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Carbon price must rule out coal: Climate and Health Alliance

As the Multi Party Climate Change Committee (MPCCC) meets today, a national group of health care stakeholders is calling for climate policy that recognises the human health costs of current power generation.

In particular, the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) says Australia's carbon price must result in no new coal fired power stations and must create a strong incentive for the roll-out of large scale renewable energy to replace fossil fuelled electricity generation.

The Climate and Health Alliance is pointing to a new study from the Harvard Medical School, published in the *Annals of New York Academy of Science*, which estimates the economic, health and environmental costs of the life cycle of coal is costing the US public a third to one half of a trillion dollars annually.¹

"If the estimated health and environmental costs of coal were included in the price of coal-fired electricity, according to this study it would double or triple its cost, and make safer non-fossil renewable energy generation cost competitive," CAHA Convenor Fiona Armstrong said.

The Harvard study looked at the lifecycle costs of coal, including mining, transport, processing and combustion, which are not accounted for by the coal industry and which fall onto the rest of the community in increased health costs, injuries, illnesses and deaths.

"The use of coal for electricity generation, given its huge contribution to global warming and strong evidence of its significant detrimental effects on human health, should mean coal has no place in Australia's future energy supply system," Ms Armstrong said.

Air pollutants account for a huge proportion of the health costs, contributing to: respiratory diseases such as asthma and lung cancer; cardiovascular diseases which lead to heart attacks; while mercury contributes to developmental delay and permanently reduced intellectual capacity in exposed children.²

Heavy metals and carcinogens released during the processing of coal also contaminate water and food sources which can lead to long term health problems.

The Climate and Health Alliance is also calling for the immediate removal of fossil fuel subsidies, currently estimated at \$12 billion a year, and for the application of those funds to support the roll-out of large scale renewable energy.

The opposition to the introduction of a carbon price was short-sighted and failed to account for the much greater costs that lie ahead in dealing with more dramatic climate change and increased health costs, Ms Armstrong said.

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¹ Epstein, P. Full cost accounting for the life cycle of coal, *Annals of New York Academy of Sciences*, 1219: 73-98.

² Physicians for Social Responsibility, *Coal's Assault on Human Health*, November 2009.