



Media release

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Major health threat overlooked in national medical research review

Health groups have responded with alarm to a paper released last week from a national review of health and medical research, suggesting the review has failed to identify one of the most significant threats to human health and wellbeing: climate change.

The Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia, chaired by former Australian of the Year Simon McKeon, has failed to acknowledge one of the most significant threats to health and wellbeing, according to the Climate and Health Alliance, a broad coalition of healthcare stakeholders including professional associations representing public health experts, doctors, nurses, researchers, allied health professionals and healthcare consumers.

“Climate change is widely acknowledged in the health and medical literature as one of the most significant threats to human health, and yet this “strategic review” of health and medical research is completely silent on the topic,” said CAHA Convenor, Fiona Armstrong.

The international medical journal *The Lancet* identified climate change as “the biggest threat to global public health of the 21st century” in 2009 and last week, [a report on the human and economic costs of climate change commissioned by 20 governments](#) revealed that it is now a leading cause of deaths with 400,000 people dying each year globally as a direct result of climate change, while the carbon intensive global economy is responsible for 4.5 million deaths annually.

“The failure of this national review of health and medical research to prioritise research into the impacts of climate change and the carbon intensive economy on human health is a shocking oversight,” Ms Armstrong said.

“The evidence of harm to health is very clear. Climate change should be one of the national health research priorities, and yet there is not one single mention of climate change in this report.”

Spending by the National Health and Medical Research Council on health and medical research with any relationship to climate change over the last decade was just 0.23% of the total spend – vastly out of step with the risks to health, CAHA said.

The recent report by the [Australian Government Climate Commission](#) demonstrates many Australians are vulnerable to health risks that are exacerbated by climate change, Ms Armstrong said.

“We are calling for a reorganisation of national health and medical research priorities to fit with actual risks to health and wellbeing. Australians are vulnerable to heatwaves; rising temperatures mean increases in infectious diseases and vector borne diseases; air pollutants and rising temperatures create a toxic mix that contributes to premature deaths; and extreme weather events cause injuries, disease, and deaths. On top of those risks is the inadequate preparation of the already overstretched healthcare system to respond to these risks – creating a deadly mix that is putting lives at risk.”

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