



MEDIA RELEASE

31 March 2013

We're not yet ready for climate change but it's here now, and harming our health

The risks of failing to act on climate change have been vastly underestimated by the world's governments and the community, Australian health groups said today in response to the release of the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate (IPCC) report.

"Climate change is affecting people in every nation, on every continent, and it's having an overwhelmingly negative impact on health," Dr Liz Hanna, climate and health researcher and President of the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) said.

"Extreme weather is having a devastating toll, with hundreds of thousands of deaths and injuries from heat events, storms, fires, and floods, and subsequent displacement, hunger and disease. While those in developing nations are hit hardest, and take longer to recover, people in developed countries like Australia are also vulnerable to the extreme weather events that are becoming more frequent and more severe as a result of climate change," Dr Hanna said.

The report reveals that children are most critically affected, with a substantial negative impact on child development and stunting from under nutrition among children in developing countries associated with crop failures and weather related disasters.

"This latest report brings together the important scientific understanding of what is happening in our warming world. The insights from the report can help us avoid worse risks and manage unavoidable risks of climate change - if we act swiftly," Dr Hanna said.

The report reveals the health sector is one of the sectors most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change.

"There are good examples of where health systems and health services are beginning to adapt and take action to reduce both the risks from climate change and reduce their contribution to greenhouse gas emissions," Dr Hanna said. "But much more needs to be done."

The IPCC report reveals that the world's failure to act to curb emissions means it may no longer be possible to limit global warming to the target sought by many developing nations of 1.5°C* above pre-industrial temperatures, making mitigation ever more urgent.

"This means we need to act at a global level, a national level, at state and community level and as individuals. We must do all we can to cut emissions and urge others to do so if we are to avoid putting health at greater risk," Dr Hanna said. "The reality is, cutting emissions will bring many immediate benefits for public health, as well as help limit climate change in the longer term. We can afford to do it but we cannot afford to wait."

Media contact: Fiona Armstrong convenor@caha.org.au or 0438900005.

* While the world agreed to a 2°C target in Copenhagen in 2009, the following year in Cancun, it was agreed that a 1.5C goal (sought by 44 nations in Alliance of Small Island States aosis.org) would be considered on the basis of the "best scientific knowledge available".