Public Health Association AUSTRALIA

One Health and Climate Change

Policy Position Statement

Key messages

A safe environment and climate are core determinants of human health and wellbeing, within which the socioeconomic and political structures of society operate. Increasing anthropogenic disruptions are threatening their capacity to provide necessary ecological services to the systems which support human, animal and environmental health. This policy seeks to outline a series of principles and tangible actions designed to ensure the wellbeing of people, while also supporting health of animals and the environment.

Key policy positions:

1. The inextricable links between human, animal and environmental health necessitate a One Health approach in responding to the impacts of climate change. The paradigm of One Health recognises the need for a collaborative multi-sectorial and transdisciplinary approach to achieve optimal health outcomes for humans, animals, plants and the environment.
2. The interface between environment, human and animal health in the context of climate change remains insufficiently recognised and is unaddressed in current initiatives by Australian Government. The lack of a multidisciplinary body enabling a unified national cross-sectoral response, constrains the effectiveness and scope of response to climate change on human, animal and environmental health.
3. An integrated One Health approach will optimise the wellbeing of humans, animals and the environment.
4. While the Australian Government has demonstrated commitment towards broader One Health integration – such as with the establishment of a One Health coordination unit within the interim Australian CDC – there is a need for clear strategies to operationalise One Health across government, academia, health professionals and industry and to demonstrate the value add. There is a critical need for sustainable action-oriented approaches that clearly define avenues for cross-sectoral collaboration, appropriate resource allocation and clearly defined frameworks for One Health implementation.

Audience: Federal, State and Territory Governments, policymakers and program managers, PHAA members, media.

Responsibility: PHAA One Health Special Interest Group

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PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. Optimal human health is inextricably interconnected with the animal, plant and environmental health.[1] Nature underpins our economy, climate, and health and wellbeing. Importantly, connection to country is connection to culture and identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[2]
2. Climate change is a health emergency.[3] Urgent action to ensure a safe environment and stabilise the climate is a critical public health priority.[4]
3. The effects of global heating are novel, far-ranging and complex. Addressing these challenges require a coordinated, collaborative, multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to ensure the wellbeing of humans, animals and the environment.
4. The interface between environment, human and animal health in the context of climate change remains insufficiently recognised and addressed in current initiatives by the Australian Government, limiting the effectiveness and scope of its response to the impacts of climate change on human, animal and environmental health.
5. Biodiversity is vulnerable to climate change and there is an urgent need to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.[2]

PHAA notes the following evidence:

6. Many current and predicted negative health impacts on humans, animals and the environment are a consequence of anthropogenic climate change.[3,5]
7. One Health approach aims to optimise prevention and management of existing and emerging risks by recognising the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans, animals, and the environment, and enabling collaboration across sectors, disciplines and communities.
8. Climate change related risks in Australia include heatwaves, bushfires, floods, droughts, cyclones and rising sea levels.[6] The impacts on physical and mental health include vector-borne, food-borne and water-borne diseases, cardiovascular and respiratory illness, physical trauma and psychosocial distress, necessitating a One Health approach to effectively address these threats to human health.[6]
9. Disease emergence is propelled by climate driven changes in vector and host populations and environmental stress on wildlife populations, resulting in the potential for spill-over events.[1]
10. Climate change is seen by scientists from many disciplines as the greatest health challenge of the 21st century, with current and future threats to human, animal and environmental health and all aspects of society clearly acknowledged.[3,7]
11. Climate change will alter the distribution and incidence of a wide range of diseases, either directly or indirectly (e.g. diseases with a development stage outside the host).[8,9]
12. Food production practices also contribute to climate change, either through changes in land-use (e.g., tree-clearing) to provide space and feed for animals or more directly from production systems that emit greenhouse gases (e.g., red meat production from ruminants emitting methane, use of fossil fuel dependent farm machinery).[10]

13. The health of humans, animals and their shared environment are inextricably linked; as such, addressing climate change impacts requires a One Health approach in order to:

    a. Mitigate and minimise further temperature increase - including actions to reduce fossil fuel consumption, reduce waste production, recycle waste, build green sustainable cities, and reduce the adverse impact of heat on human, animal and environmental health.

    b. Preserve clean water supply – including responding to extreme weather events such as floods, cyclones and droughts, management of human and animal waste, and surveillance for infectious diseases such as leptospirosis.[11]

    c. Ensure food safety – with healthy diets from ecologically sustainable food systems. This requires insight into social, health and economic impacts of climate change on agri– and aqua-cultural practices including global livestock production and fisheries management.[11,12] Research and investment into regenerative farming practices is also indicated to ensure sustainability of food crops.

    d. Establish collaborative and cooperative human and animal health surveillance systems at the interface between wildlife/people, wildlife/food animals and food animals/people as well as surveillance of vector populations to enable early detection and response to zoonotic and emerging disease spill over events.

    e. Maintain environmental health and biodiversity at local, regional and national levels.

14. Australia has developed National Health and Climate Strategy and National Biodiversity Action Plan called "Nature". We acknowledge the One Health and Planetary Health Principle to address the interface between climate change, environmental health, and human and animal health in the National Health and Climate Strategy.[13]

15. The new proposed Australian CDC may have a One Health coordination and collaboration role. However, no clear strategies to operationalise One Health nationally across sectors and disciplines have been developed and current funding commitments provide limited recognition of its importance.

16. Implementing this policy would contribute towards the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing and 10 – Reducing Inequalities.

PHAA seeks the following actions:

17. Across all levels of government, integrate One Health principles into climate change and health related disciplines, and national climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience joint plans of action.

18. A whole of government approach to develop clear strategies to operationalise One Health across government, academia, health professionals, relevant industry, and non-government organisations. Strategies that include and action-oriented approaches that clearly define avenues for cross-sectoral collaboration, appropriate resource allocation, and clearly defined frameworks for One Health implementation.

19. PHAA will continue the call for the Government to reduce emissions to at least meet, if not exceed Australia's commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement.

20. The Government should be guided by the Climate and Health Alliance's Healthy, Regenerative and Just framework principles (p.20-21): Right to health; Community safety and resilience; Planetary boundaries and planetary health; Environmental protection for health and wellbeing; Health in all Policies; Intragenerational and intergenerational equity; Minimising and managing risk; Indigenous rights,

recognition and reconciliation; and Citizen engagement. As well as the framework Areas for Policy Action and Reform (p.23): Health Promoting and Emissions Reducing Policies; Supporting Healthy and Resilient Communities; Thriving Ecosystems; Emergency and Disaster-preparedness; Education and Capacity Building; A Sustainable and Climate-resilient Health Care Sector; Research and Data; Leadership and Governance.

21. Establish a multidisciplinary body comprising of human, animal and environmental health experts to work with economists/engineers/social scientists using evidence-based approach to equipping health practitioners and instituting health-based interventions for infectious and non-infectious health conditions associated with climate change. This includes integrated human, animal and meteorology surveillance systems.
22. Establish interdepartmental coordination body to support sustainable agricultural and aquacultural practices to ensure water and food security nationally as well as providing due consideration of animal welfare impacts to both wildlife and food animals in the context of climate change.

PHAA resolves to:

23. Advocate for the above steps to be taken based on the principles in this position statement.
24. Establish advocacy collaborations with liked minded organisations like Vets for Climate Action, Climate and Health Alliance and Doctors for the Environment.

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