

Nuclear Weapons

Policy Position Statement

Key messages:	Nuclear weapons remain the most acute existential threat to humanity and the environment on which we depend. The high risk of their use, by accident or design, remains as long as nuclear weapons exist, and particularly as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, is widely assessed to be greater than it has ever been. The eradication of nuclear weapons is an urgent planetary health imperative. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted at the United Nations in 2017, entered into legal force on 22 Jan 2021. It is a historic step which all governments, including Australia, should support and join.
Key policy positions:	PHAA will urge the Australian government to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Exclude any role for nuclear weapons in Australia's military policies and exclude Australian facilities and personnel from any role in military preparations to use nuclear weapons;2. Promptly sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and ratify it as soon as feasible.
Audience:	Federal, State and Territory Governments, policymakers and program managers, PHAA members, media.
Responsibility:	PHAA's International Health & Ecology and Environment Special Interest Groups (SIGs).
Date adopted:	September 2023
Contacts:	Professor Jaya Dantas, Convenor, International Health SIG, jaya.dantas@curtin.edu.au
Citation:	Nuclear Weapons Policy: Policy Position Statement [Internet]. Canberra: Public Health Association of Australia; 2017 [updated Sep 2023]. Available from: URL

Nuclear Weapons Policy Statement

Policy position statement

PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. All nuclear-armed states are currently in violation of their obligation to disarm.
2. All global health progress and efforts would be in vain if nuclear weapons are used again.

PHAA notes the following evidence:

3. In March 2023, around 12,500 nuclear warheads were held by China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, United States of America (USA), and United Kingdom. Russia and USA own 89% of the world's nuclear weapons. 3,844 are operationally deployed and about 2,000 are on high alert, ready for use within minutes. For the first time since the 1990s, the number of nuclear weapons operationally deployed with military forces is again increasing.¹
4. All nuclear-armed states are in violation of their obligation to disarm. There are currently no negotiations between nuclear-armed states about reducing warheads or curtailing risks, operations, and modernisations. Instead, Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has been accompanied by repeated explicit threats to use nuclear weapons and brought Russian and NATO forces into proximity with grave risks or deliberate or inadvertent escalation, including to nuclear war. There are also ongoing crises in South Asia, the Korean peninsula, north-east Asia, and the South China Sea, with increasing danger of armed conflict and nuclear escalation. All the nuclear-armed states reaffirm the importance of their nuclear weapons for the indefinite future and are modernising their nuclear arsenals at enormous cost.²
5. The USA, for example, plans to spend over US\$2 trillion over the next 30 years to upgrade its entire nuclear arsenal and production complex,² and Russia is developing and deploying several types of entirely new nuclear weapons, including an intercontinental nuclear-powered cruise missile and long-range nuclear-powered torpedo.
6. In January 2023, the Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock forward to 90 seconds to midnight, the closest to catastrophe it has ever been, principally due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its mounting dangers. They said: "Russia's thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons remind the world that escalation of the conflict - by accident, intention, or miscalculation - is a terrible risk."³ Once the threshold of nuclear weapons use is crossed, the risk of large-scale escalation is extremely high.^{4,5}
7. The General Assembly of the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) called for the abolition of nuclear weapons in 1997, asserting the threat they pose to human civilisation and the global environment. Relating to the war in Ukraine, WFPHA along with International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) acknowledge the current public health disaster that would be massively amplified by the use nuclear weapons.⁶ Russia's invasion of Ukraine underscores the fact that nuclear weapons do not prevent major wars, but rather embolden and assist nuclear-armed states to start wars. War between nuclear-armed states is not only possible, but has already happened repeatedly, such as in South Asia.⁷

8. In addition, direct Russian military attacks on, occupation and disruption of safe operation of nuclear power plants in Ukraine have effectively weaponised and put in jeopardy the safety and security of these extremely large repositories of hazardous and long-lived radioactive materials.
9. In 2022, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, the world's largest humanitarian organisation, reiterated its 2011 appeal to all states "to ensure that nuclear weapons are never again used" and "to pursue... and conclude with urgency and determination negotiations to prohibit the use of and completely eliminate nuclear weapons through a legally binding international agreement."⁸
10. In 2022 the fourth Intergovernmental Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons built upon the 2013 and 2014 conferences to outline that:
 - a. Any use of nuclear weapons would be catastrophic, risking long-term consequences of global nuclear winter and widespread starvation;
 - b. The impact of atmospheric nuclear tests has had greater impacts on ecosystems and health than initially believed;
 - c. No effective response can address the humanitarian emergency and long-term consequences of nuclear weapon detonations and what cannot be responded to must be prevented;
 - d. The risk of nuclear weapons use has been underestimated and is growing; and
 - e. Nuclear weapons, as the most destructive and indiscriminate of all, were until 2021, the only and last weapon of mass destruction not prohibited under international law.⁹
11. Detonation of even less than 3% of the world's nuclear arsenal in one region would result in climate catastrophe with the ignition of cities lofting tens of millions of tons of sooty smoke high into the atmosphere, blanketing the globe. Earth's surface would rapidly cool, with ice age temperatures, darkening and reduced rainfall persisting for over a decade. Drastic, sustained declines in food production worldwide would put up to one third of the global population at risk of death from starvation within two years and end global civilisation. A nuclear war involving deployed Russian and US nuclear weapons is conservatively estimated to cause the death by starvation two years after the war of over five billion of a 2010 global population of 6.7 billion.¹⁰ All other global health progress and efforts would be in vain if nuclear weapons are used again.
12. Treaties unequivocally prohibiting unacceptable weapons and providing for their elimination have been key in progress towards control and elimination of other indiscriminate, inhumane weapons, including biological, toxin and chemical weapons, antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions. Indeed, no weapon has been controlled without first being prohibited. Under both Labor and Coalition governments, Australia has joined all those prohibition treaties.
13. In April 2016, WFPHA with IPPNW, the World Medical Association (WMA) and the International Council of Nurses (ICN) submitted to a UN Working Group a statement detailing the planetary health imperative to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons.¹¹
14. By a majority of over 3 to 1, the UNGA in 2016 voted to implement the recommendations of the UN Working Group. In March 2017, WFPHA, IPPNW, WMA and ICN submitted a Working Paper to the negotiating conference strongly supporting a ban treaty on public health grounds.¹² On 7 July 2017, the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their elimination, by a vote of 122 to 1 with 1 abstention, adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).¹³
15. This historic evidence-based treaty provides a categorical and comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons. It also contains for the first time in the nuclear field, obligations on states parties to assist

- the victims of, and remediate environments contaminated by, nuclear weapons use and testing; as well as the only internationally agreed framework for the elimination of nuclear weapons.
16. The TPNW entered into force on 22 January 2021. This was welcomed by WFPHA, ICN, WMA, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Medical Student Associations (IFMSA) and IPPNW. They jointly stated: "Ending nuclear weapons before they end humankind, and many other lifeforms is an urgent health and humanitarian imperative. The treaty is a crucial step towards the eradication of nuclear weapons and a planetary health good of the highest order. We urge all nations to seize the opportunity the treaty offers and sign, ratify and faithfully implement it."¹⁴
 17. As of 21 July 2023, 92 states have signed, and 68 states have ratified the treaty.
 18. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was founded in Melbourne by the Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) together with IPPNW. ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2017, the first to an entity born in Australia, "for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons."¹⁵
 19. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), joined by 191 nations including Australia, commits all states parties, without discrimination, to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament." The TPNW provides an updated legal framework for the elimination of nuclear weapons, complements the NPT, and provides "an effective way to build a safer future for all Australians."¹⁶
 20. While successive Australian government's claim to support nuclear disarmament, these claims are contradicted and undermined by continuing support for nuclear weapons in the defence of Australia and the possible use of US nuclear weapons on Australia's behalf. Facilities and personnel in Australia contribute to the possible use of US nuclear weapons through assistance with command, control and targeting of such weapons.^{11,16}
 21. In 2018, the Australian Labor Party unanimously adopted a National Policy Platform to sign and ratify the TPNW in government. This policy was re-affirmed in 2021. The current Labor government has taken modest positive steps regarding the TPNW by re-affirming the ALP policy platform, sending an observer delegation to the first meeting of states parties to the treaty, and becoming the first nuclear-allied state not to oppose the TPNW in its voting at the UNGA. However, the government has not yet made a decision to join the TPNW. There is no valid reason why Australia could not sign the TPNW in the first term of the current government.¹¹
 22. The Australian government's plan to advance the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines adds to the importance and urgency of signing the TPNW. Joining the TPNW is the most effective and durable way to make clear that such submarines and the increasing presence of US and UK military forces in Australia will not lead to stationing of nuclear weapons in Australia, delivery of nuclear weapons by Australian forces, or acquisition of nuclear weapons by Australia.
 23. Several other USA allies, such as New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines have already demonstrated that joining the TPNW is entirely compatible with alliances and continuing non-nuclear military collaboration with the USA.
 24. In a recent editorial published by over 100 international medical journals, authors highlight the importance of collective health professional action to advocate for change at the policy level and to

raise awareness amongst the community. Current action is insufficient to prevent the threat and potential use of nuclear weapons. Historically, through the period of the cold war, health professionals played a vital role in educating people and advocating for change, and this collective action is required again. It is a call to action, as current progress is too slow, and the dangers of nuclear weapons are too great.^{17,18}

PHAA seeks the following actions:

25. PHAA will urge the Australian government to:
 - a. Exclude any role for nuclear weapons in Australia's military policies and exclude Australian facilities and personnel from any role in military preparations to use nuclear weapons;
 - b. Promptly sign the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and ratify it as soon as feasible;
 - c. Fully comply with its obligations under other nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, including the NPT and South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.

PHAA resolves to:

26. PHAA will collaborate with public health and humanitarian partners in further educating the public and public health professionals on the imperative to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons.

ADOPTED September 2023

(First adopted 2017, updated 2020 and 2023)

References

1. Federation of American Scientists, Kristensen HM, Korda M, Reynolds E. Status of world nuclear forces. Federation of American Scientists. Updated March 28, 2023. Accessed April 12, 2023.
2. Acheson R (Ed), Pytlak A (Ed), Dolev S, Fenton J, Gupta P, Ko Y, et al. Assuring destruction forever: 2022 edition. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; 2022.
3. Mecklin J (Ed). A time of unprecedented danger: It is 90 seconds to midnight. 2023 doomsday clock statement. Science and Security Board: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Updated January 24, 2023.
4. Borger J. Biden warns world would face 'Armageddon' if Putin uses a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine. The Guardian. October 7, 2022. Accessed May 16, 2023.
5. The Mitchell Institute Triad Conference. U.S. Strategic Command. Jul 17, 2018. Accessed May, 2023.
6. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, World Federation of Public Health Associations. The use of chemical or nuclear weapons in Ukraine or anywhere is unacceptable! World Federation of Public Health Associations. March 28, 2023. Accessed April 12, 2023.
7. Federal Ministry Republic of Austria European and International Affairs. Chair's summary: Vienna conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. Federal Ministry Republic of Austria European and International Affairs; 2022. Final 20.6.22. Accessed May 16, 2023.
8. Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Working towards the elimination of nuclear weapons: 2022-2027 action plan, Resolution June 2022. International Committee of the Red Cross; 2022. CD/22/R7. Accessed April 12, 2023.
9. Department for Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. The 2022 Vienna conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs; 2022. Accessed April 12, 2023.
10. Bivens M. Nuclear famine: even a "limited" nuclear war would cause abrupt climate disruption and global starvation. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War; 2022.
11. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Australia. Australia. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Australia. Accessed April 13, 2023.
12. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, World Medical Association, World Federation of Public Health Associations, International Council of Nurses. The health and humanitarian case for banning and eliminating nuclear weapons. United Nations; 2017. A/CONF.229/2017/NGO/WP.11. Accessed April 13, 2023.
13. United Nations General Assembly. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 7 December 2022: Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. United Nations; 2022. A/RES/77/54.
14. The International Committee of the Red Cross, International Council of Nurses, International Federation of Medical Student Associations, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, World Federation of Public Health Associations, World Medical Association. International health and humanitarian organizations welcome the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The International Committee of the Red Cross; 2021.
15. The Norwegian Nobel Committee. The Nobel Peace Prize 2017. Nobel Prize Outreach. October 6, 2017. Updated October 19, 2017. Accessed April 13, 2023.
16. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Australia. Choosing humanity: why Australia must join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Australia; 2019. Accessed April 13, 2023.
17. Abbasi K, Ali P, Barbour V, Bibbins-Domingo K, Olde Rikkert MGM, Haines A, et al. Reducing the risks of nuclear war - the role of health professionals. Medical Journal of Australia; 2023.

18. Hunt S. The Medical Journal of Australia joins with other journals to call for elimination of nuclear weapons. InSight. August 7, 2023. Accessed August 10, 2023.