Be a climate hero - switch on the fan

Switch on the humble fan! It's a great first step to reducing climate change which is a major threat to Australians' health, according to Professor of Planetary Health Tony Capon.

"My colleague Dr Ollie Jay has shown that fans are a really effective way for most people to keep cool in a heatwave," Professor Capon of University of Sydney says, "it costs you a lot less to run your fan than your air-conditioner, so less of an energy cost directly and also less of a carbon cost."

Extreme weather events including heatwaves and floods can be deadly and climate change, together with rapid urbanisation, harms health by increasing malnutrition, diarrhoea, overheating, mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue, mental illness and conflict.

Elderly people, infants, people of low socio-economic status and developing nations bear the brunt of the burden of the environmental degradation driven by wealthy nations' addiction to high-consumption lifestyles.

"There's no doubt that poor people around the world are most affected. It's about owning up to that addiction to consumption and trying to re-think it," Professor Capon says.

New thinking is needed from the flick of a switch to global governance, Professor Capon will tell the Public Health Association Australia's Planetary Health Forum in Sydney on 28 June.

"There's plenty of evidence that these high-consumption, material ways of living are actually not doing our health any good," says Professor Capon, one of the health professionals forging global networks to promote new thinking on climate change including the Planetary Health Alliance and the Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being.

"If everybody in the world lived as the average Australian lives we would need four or more planets," Professor Capon said. "The only reason it's been limping along is because the people in India and elsewhere do not have access to their fair share of the planet."

Australians in cities such as Fremantle are trying out "one planet living" by reducing waste, and encouraging people to recycle, reuse and repair and grow and share food, he said. But such initiatives need state and federal governments to chip in with longer-term policies on sustainable energy and infrastructure.

Public Health Association of Australia President David Templeman said Australia's leaders need to accept the science of climate change and act because: "Climate change is the greatest threat to public health at the present time."

Heatwaves can be more deadly than bushfires, he said, for example in the 2009 heatwave Victoria recorded 374 excess deaths in just one week while cardiac arrests nearly tripled, emergency call-outs rose by 46 per cent and cases of heat-related illness leapt 34-fold.

For further comment please contact:
PHAA President David Templeman on davidtempleman1@live.com or 0414 265 122
For more information the PHAA NSW Branch event go to: https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/planetary-health-forum-tickets-34872519645