2 September 2019

Dear Professor Weeramanthri,

Thank you for accepting this supplementary submission from the Public Health Association of Australia, to the Climate Health WA Inquiry.

This supplementary submission extends our previous comments under the Terms of Reference:

identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will:

• protect the public from the harmful health impacts of climate change;
• enable WA Health services to implement change, including energy efficiency, to a more sustainable model

and

• define the role of the Department of Health in leading public policy on climate change and health;

As we submitted previously, the ‘Protecting the health of vulnerable people from the humanitarian consequences of climate change and climate related disasters’ paper identified among its five policy directions: enhancing capacity to address public health emergencies and enhancing local public health interventions to enhance community resilience to climate-change and climate-related disasters.¹

An exercise carried out by the ANU Medical School Population Health course identified Public Health Acts as a means that might be used by medical officers of health to take action to mitigate the health impacts of climate change.² Subsequent discussion within the medical officer of health community has however raised difficulties with how the Acts as conceived might be applied and with the need to work within limits of ministerial discretion.


The Inquiry provides the opportunity for WA to bring public health thinking into the 21st century. A more eco-social approach to public health thinking that brings in the ideas of ecological determinants of health in parallel to social and environmental, in line with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, will enable WA to meet a whole raft of public health challenges and threats that the last century writers of existing Acts did not imagine.

Thus we would like to add a further recommendation for the Inquiry to consider, that is that the Public Health Act be reviewed with the intent to broaden the concept of environmental health and put a more planetary health approach clearly into the legislation (an eco-social model) that focuses public health activity at ecological in addition to social health determinants. Additionally, in this domain, more formal links to state EPAs might be built into the legislation. Such an approach would apply to climate change, but also to other public health threats around water and food security, that occur due to related ecological change.

The PHAA appreciates the opportunity to make this supplementary submission. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require additional information or have any queries in relation to this submission.

Yours Sincerely,

Terry Slevin
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia

Hannah Pierce
PHAA Branch President
Western Australia

Dr Peter Tait
Co-Convener, PHAA
Ecology and Environment
Special Interest Group

---