Leadership must not fail us on natural disaster public health hazards

David Templeman, President of the Public Health Association Australia said today:

“This season’s devastating bushfires have severely harmed the health of Australians, and we can expect significant ongoing impact on health and wellbeing.”

“In addition to deaths, people are suffering a gamut of injuries from burns to severe asthma and mental health trauma.”

“The adverse effects, while shocking, are in line with decades-old predictions about the impacts of global warming.”

“The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) calls on the Australian Government to not just invest in post-disaster reconstruction but invest more in prevention and mitigation to limit the impact of future disasters, bushfires and all other potential events related to climate change.”

“The Climate and Health Alliance National Strategy for Climate, Health and Wellbeing Framework offers a way forward on how to do that. It can be adopted today in tandem with a multi-department plan.”

“It is not enough to simply rebuild and restore. We need to mitigate the risk, adapt and prepare for the future, promote and build resilience and hope in individuals and communities.”

“There is palpable frustration that the federal and jurisdictional governments have not heeded these warnings for years.”

“PHAA joins the voices of millions of Australians and calls on the Australian Government to adopt a leadership role in advocating for global action to reduce warming and doing its part with more ambitious greenhouse gas emissions targets.”

“More immediately, we need action by all levels of government to work cooperatively and urgently to prevent and reduce the severity of the public health emergencies arising from the bushfires, including smoke-related air-borne and water-born illness.”

“As air quality is compromised and water infrastructure challenged by bushfire ash, we are again reminded of the value of public research and monitoring, public utilities and an expert public service working to get health promotion messages out and keep the public safe.”

“Authorities are encouraged to establish with urgency how they can better communicate with citizens at these times, so important health related information is sent out effectively, in real time.”
“We can’t afford to see an ongoing lack of leadership and coordination the next month, as we’ve seen the past month.”

“The multitude of health, mental health, ecological, economic and social factors that are emerging consequent to this fire season need to be taken into account in planning going forward.”

“PHAA urges caution in relation to dogma about so-called ‘green’ or ‘red tape’. When functioning well, health protection appears easy, almost natural and taken for granted. It is tempting to think that regulation and compliance happens without any effort,” Mr Templeman said.

_The PHAA is the national body for public health, advancing the public health of all Australians._

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