

COMMUNIQUE

The interim Australian Centre for Disease Control (interim CDC) and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) hosted a Multi-College Roundtable on Climate Change and Health on 28 June 2024.

Climate change poses profound and urgent challenges to the health and wellbeing of all Australians. In 2023, Australia's first [National Health and Climate Strategy](#) was launched setting out 49 actions for implementation between 2024 and 2028.

The interim CDC and the Commission jointly hosted a Multi-College Roundtable on Climate Change and Health on 28 June 2024. The Roundtable was co-chaired by Professor Paul Kelly, Head of the interim CDC and Chief Medical Officer of Australia, and Professor Anne Duggan, Chief Executive Officer of the Commission. All 15 Australasian medical colleges were represented, eight by their college presidents. The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) was also represented.

The interim CDC is working to ensure the health system can reduce emissions and adapt to the challenges presented by climate change by implementing the National Health and Climate Strategy. The Commission leads and coordinates key improvements in safety and quality in health care across Australia, including programs of work to improve appropriate and sustainable health care. It is currently piloting new standards in an [Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Healthcare Module](#). This module provides a framework of actions that use existing health service governance, safety and quality systems.

The medical colleges have responsibilities in education, training and leadership to prepare and equip doctors for modern practice. The AIDA's purpose is to grow ethical and professional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors who will lead and drive equitable and just health outcomes for all.¹

The Roundtable brought together these key groups to discuss and agree to work collaboratively towards a climate-resilient, high-quality and low-emission health system for Australia.

The Roundtable specifically focussed on collaborative action towards:

- Reducing health system emissions by tackling unwarranted variation in care delivery and optimising models of care (Strategy actions 4.7 and 4.8).
- Mobilising and supporting the health workforce to lead the health system response to climate change (Strategy action 7.1).

Across the discussions, there was strong and broad support for ongoing medical engagement in supporting and leading the health system response to climate change. Participants noted that climate change is having escalating impacts on population health and health service delivery. Further, there was recognition that the health system itself produces significant greenhouse gas emissions and so has a responsibility and opportunity to reduce its own environmental impact through the delivery of appropriate and sustainable health care. It was also agreed that many climate actions would have substantial health co-benefits, such as cleaner air, healthier diets, and greener and cooler cities. The strong alignment between a climate-resilient, high-quality and low-emission health system and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles of stewardship and Caring for Country were acknowledged, and cultural safety identified as a key theme underpinning ongoing collaboration.

¹ Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, [About Us](#), AIDA website, n.d., accessed 12 July 2024.

Roundtable participants endorsed the approach of decarbonising the health system via the three principles of sustainable healthcare:

- 1) Preventing ill health, acknowledging the importance of health in all policies – given that many health protection and health promotion opportunities occur outside the health system;
- 2) Providing appropriate care and tackling unwarranted variation in care delivery; and
- 3) Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the delivery of care.

Suggested actions that the medical colleges could take to improve appropriateness of care and reduce greenhouse gas emissions included, but were not limited to;

- Integrating the need for sustainable and appropriate care throughout all aspects of education and training including in examinations, awards, quality improvement and CPD programs.
- Developing a shared climate and health educational resource which could be used across all colleges.
- Establishing multi-disciplinary networks and partnerships with nursing and allied health colleagues for those medical colleges which hadn't yet established these.

The draft *Joint Statement: Working together to achieve sustainable high-quality health care in a changing climate* was developed by the interim CDC and the Commission in consultation with the medical colleges and AIDA and tabled for discussion at the Roundtable. Suggestions for edits to the Joint Statement received at the Roundtable have been considered and an updated draft circulated to all medical colleges and AIDA. There was broad support at the Roundtable for a working group comprising 1-2 representatives from each medical college, the Commission, the interim CDC and possibly others to drive this agenda forward. The interim CDC will lead this work with support from the Commission. The recommendations and outputs from this working group are to be reported to the Council of Medical College Presidents which will allow medical colleges to have a coordinated approach.

An annual Climate and Health Roundtable was strongly supported by all participants.

It is intended that at the upcoming Council of Presidents of Medical Colleges Meeting on 22 August 2024, endorsement of the Joint Statement will be noted and a proposed governance structure to facilitate ongoing collaboration on climate change and health considered for endorsement.