EHA POLICY

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AUSTRALIA

EHA Climate Change and Sustainability Policy

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1. Purpose

Environmental Health Australia (EHA) recognises that climate change presents one of the most significant challenges to public health we have ever faced. Climate change is putting at risk the very pillars of life: clean water, sanitation, air quality and food (CIEH, 2016).

The purpose of this policy is to articulate EHA commitment to adaptation and environmental sustainability. This policy will support the environmental health profession in implementing measures aimed at mitigation of, and adaption to adverse impacts of climate change on human health.

2. Background

EHA acknowledges that there is overwhelming, credible scientific evidence that anthropogenic climate change threatens the health, well-being, and indeed survival, of the human population. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCCWG1) report (2014) states 'Global warming is a well-established phenomenon. Combined land and ocean surface temperature data, as a global average, show an increase of about 0.72°C (0.49-0.89) over the period 1951-2012. Each of the past 3 decades has been significantly warmer than all previous decades with recorded data.

Understanding the human, social and ecological implications of climate change is complex and challenging. And for this reason, some degree of uncertainty is unavoidable. It involves a study of not just one 'system' but three: the climate system; the biophysical system of the natural environment; and the own social system of humans. Each is complex and multi-dimensional in its own right; they interact with one another (IPCC, 2014).

EHA considers it imperative that society is adapting to climate change while mitigating GHG emissions in order to decrease the rate and magnitude of harm. In Australia, environmental health professionals are ideally placed (within both their own organisations and their wider communities) to exert significant professional pressure, providing technical advice and support for measures aimed at adaptation and mitigation of the negative health impacts of climate change.

3. Scope

This policy focuses on the environmental health impacts of climate change including vector control, infectious disease, heat stress, food safety and security, disaster management, indigenous health, environmental protection, waste management, air and water quality. This policy will provide guidance to the broader Environmental Health profession in climate change and sustainability matters, and drive EHA's sustainability in its strategic and day-to-day operations from the National level, and through its State Associations.

4. Policy Principles

Environmental Health Australia affirms the following principles:-

I. Greenhouse gases are causing climate change and GHG mitigation is critical.

II. Environmental health professionals have the knowledge, skills and the opportunities to make an important contribution to reduce climate change impacts and implement adaption measures against the foreseeable consequences (CIEH, 2016) which are:

- The overall health effects of a changing climate are likely to be negative. Climate change influences the fundamental requirements for health – clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter (WHO, 2012).
- There are likely more frequent or intense extreme weather events such as heat waves, storms, droughts, floods and cyclones (Hughes & McMichael, 2011).
- The habitat of mosquitoes and spread vector-borne disease will be influenced by a change in climatic conditions (Hughes & McMichael, 2011).
- Climate change may affect the development, transport, dispersion, and deposition of air pollutants (Hughes & McMichael, 2011).
- Harmful algae blooms (HAB) are an emerging environmental health concern and temperature increase may further affect water quality (Paerl & Paul, 2012).
- Increased temperatures can lead to higher incidences of food-borne and water-borne disease (Hughes & McMichael, 2011).

5. Actions

Environmental Health Australia is taking the following steps:-

I. **Environmental Health Australia will develop enhanced climate change understanding, risk communication and health education of EHA members:-**

- EHA promote career development by assisting the training of new generations of competent and experienced environmental health professionals, to respond to the health threats posed by climate change;
- EHA require its accredited university courses to include appropriate climate change and environmental health related content to ensure that graduates have relevant knowledge to meet climate change challenges;

- EHA develops appropriate sustainability policies and practices for application by the broader EH profession;
- EHA encourage EH professionals to develop themselves as *'climate change champions'* within their own organisations.

II. **Environmental Health Australia will work to develop increased public awareness that climate change is a threat to human health:–**

- EHA is a trustworthy source of information on the health consequences of climate change for the population;
- EHA will provide leadership to state and local governments, regarding the health protection, adaptation and mitigation necessary from the impacts of climate change;
- EHA will work with all levels of government and other appropriate stakeholders, to develop increased public awareness that climate change is a threat to human health.

III. **Environmental Health Australia will establish itself as an exemplar sustainability organisation:-**

- EHA will review its own programs and policies and rebuild them as appropriate to include and reflect climate change influences;
- EHA will implement sustainable administrative policies, purchasing practices and processes at national level, and through its state associations;
- EHA will source appropriate speakers/presenters in the field of climate change and adverse health impacts, for presentation at EHA sponsored conferences and courses;
- EHA will develop links and networks with accredited service providers, to provide sustainable support for EH professionals, in encouraging corporate entities (including their own agencies) to develop appropriate policies, processes and mechanisms to reduce GHGs.

IV. **While recognising that other available initiatives may not be within its direct capacity, capability or scope, Environmental Health Australia commits to supporting further appropriate measures to reduce climate change impacts -**

- building of partnerships between government agencies, private sector, nongovernmental organisations, universities, and other organisations to ensure that human health is accurately represented in the climate change agenda;
- regular **r**eview of updated scientific evidence on links between climate change and health, to improve understanding of the relationship;
- identification of locations and population groups at greatest risk of specific health threats from climate change;
- continued advocacy for greenhouse gas mitigation measures to reduce the impact for populations adapting to future catastrophic climate change;
- publication of all background guidance documentation necessary to assist in understanding of the climate science and human health relationship.

6. Definitions and Abbreviations –

Adaptation – Adjustment in natural or human systems to a new or changing environment.
Anthropogenic – Resulting from or produced by human beings
Environmental Health/EH – Environmental health addresses all the physical, chemical, and biological factors external to a person, and all the related factors impacting behaviours. It encompasses the assessment and control of those environmental factors that can potentially affect health. It is targeted towards preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments. This definition excludes behaviour not related to environment, as well as behaviour related to the social and cultural environment, and genetics. (WHO 2013)
Greenhouse gases/GHG – water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, ozone, halocarbons and other halogenated compounds
Mitigation – A human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the removal (sink) of greenhouse gases.
Sustainability – The capacity to endure, the ability of a system to maintain processes, functions, biodiversity and productivity into the future.

7. References

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