

Research Australia response to the consultation on a National Health and Climate Strategy

July 2023

Background

In June 2023 the Department of Health announced the commencement of a consultation on development of Australia's first National Health and Climate Strategy, in recognition of the urgent need to:

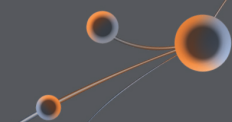
1. reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the health system, and
2. strengthen the resilience of the health system and communities to anticipate and respond to the health impacts of climate change.

Research Australia made a submission in response to the Discussion paper issued in support of this consultation. The submission addresses many of the questions contained in the discussion paper, and proposes the creation and funding of proposes the funding and creation of a Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Innovation, to support the identification and develop of mitigation measures.

It is proposed the Strategy includes the following objectives in support of this vision:

- 1. Measurement: Measure and report on health system greenhouse gas emissions, so progress in reducing emissions can be tracked and quantified.**
- 2. Mitigation: Accelerate the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the health system**
- 3. Adaptation: Strengthen the resilience of the health system and communities to anticipate and respond to the health impacts of climate change.**
- 4. Health in All Policies: Maximise the synergies between good climate policy and public health policy by working across policy areas to lessen the impact of climate change on the social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing.**

How could these objectives be improved to better support the vision of the Strategy?



Research Australia supports the proposed objectives.

In public opinion polling undertaken by Roy Morgan in June 2023 on behalf of Research Australia, 40.4% of Australians reported that they had been impacted by climate change. 10.7% reported having a physical illness linked to climate change and 12.5% reported mental illness linked to climate change. 12.8% reported they had been affected by the impact of climate change on health services. These numbers can only be expected to increase in the years and decades to come, and strengthening the resilience of communities to anticipate and respond to the health impacts of climate change is clearly essential.

Research Australia questions whether the objectives of strengthening the resilience of the health system and the resilience of communities should be a single objective or separate objectives. While both require adaptation, they are conceptually and practically two very different objectives.

How could these principles be improved to better inform the objectives of the Strategy?

The Principles are appropriate.

In respect of evidence- informed policy making Research Australia submits there should be an emphasis not only on basing the response to climate change on the best available, data, evidence and research, but to supporting the creation of evidence to inform policy making where this evidence does not currently exist. This approach engages Principle 6 by establishing a partnership between policy makers and other stakeholders to identify areas where evidence is required and support the creation of that evidence.

Which of the various types of greenhouse gas emissions discussed above should be in scope of the Strategy's emission reduction efforts?

Research Australia submits Scope 1 emissions should explicitly include emissions produced by patients and their families in the course of accessing health care.

Inclusion of these emissions helps provide an additional factor to use in evaluating the provision of virtual and remote care. It also forces consideration of where facilities are located in terms of ease of access by patients and available public transport.

Proposed focus areas for emissions reduction:

- **Built environment and facilities**
- **Travel and Transport**
- **Supply Chain**
- **Medicines and gases**
- **Waste**
- **Prevention and optimising models of care**

What do you think of these proposed focus areas for emissions reduction? Should anything else be included?

Research Australia supports the proposed focus areas. As noted above, Travel and Transport should include travel and transport by patients and their families to access healthcare.

Which specific action areas should be considered relating to travel and transport, over and above any existing policies or initiatives in this area?

As noted above, Travel and Transport should include travel and transport by patients and their families and measures to reduce the associated emissions.

Which specific action areas should be considered relating to supply chain, over and above any existing policies or initiatives in this area?

Research Australia proposes the creation and funding of a Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Innovation. This Centre would have two primary purposes:

- 1. Identify and evaluate areas for potential mitigation of emissions across the supply chain, medicines and gases, waste and prevention and optimising models of care.**
- 2. Solicit proposals for solutions to the identified areas for mitigation.**

The Centre would engage clinicians, medical administrators, engineers and health economists in the identification and evaluation of areas to target for mitigation, and the development of calls for proposals to address specific areas. In addition to providing opportunities for established Australian companies it could support start-ups through a staged research and development process to the delivery of the solution.

Which specific action areas should be considered relating to medicines and gases, over and above any existing policies or initiatives in this area?

As per our response to the earlier question, Research Australia proposes the creation and funding of a Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Innovation, to support the identification and develop of mitigation measures for supply chain, medicines and gases, waste and prevention and optimising models of care.

The following case study provides an example of the kind of innovation that can be developed to mitigate emissions across the health system. Innovations like this could be identified, supported and accelerated by the proposed Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Innovation.

Case Study: Stelect

Stelect is a Melbourne based innovative medical device company creating technology that removes the guesswork out of many procedures, by allowing clinicians access to areas in the human body that imaging has not been able to access before. For example, cardiac stents are placed in an artery using a catheter. Stents come in various sizes (both length and diameter) to suit patients of different artery sizes and different blockage lengths. There is currently guesswork in which sized stent to use, and this can lead to several stents of different sizes being used to ensure the entire coronary blockage is covered and it is sitting correctly against the artery wall. Each catheter is a single use item, and is discarded after the procedure. Stelect can reduce this waste by ensuring the stent is correctly fitted the first time. This reduces medical waste, saves money spent on multiple catheters and stents, and reduces the time for the procedure, which has savings for the health system and benefits for the patient.¹

Which specific action areas should be considered relating to prevention and optimising models of care, over and above any existing policies or initiatives in this area?

As per our response to the earlier question, Research Australia proposes the funding and creation of a Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Innovation, to support the identification and develop of mitigation measures for supply chain, medicines and gases, waste and prevention and optimising models of care.

We need a much greater national focus on reducing unnecessary care, which has benefits for patients, the health system and the environment. This requires a renewed focus on driving adoption of best evidence-based models of care and the research that produces this data.

Case Study: Institute for Evidence Based Healthcare

The IEBH, based at Bond University, is a national and international resource for scholars, clinicians, system leaders, patients and families in the implementation of evidence-based clinical care.

The IEBH addresses four big, neglected problems in healthcare:

- Antibiotic resistance
- Overdiagnosis
- Non drug pharmaceutical treatments
- Waste in research.

¹ <https://www.stelect.com.au/>

The IEBH focus in these areas assists health systems to provide care that is patient-centred and informed by evidence and enables patients to make decisions that are congruent with their values, preferences and circumstances.²

What can be done to involve private providers within the health system in the Strategy's emissions reduction efforts?

Private providers are already motivated to reduce their emissions, and doing so can benefit the business bottom line. Private providers should be encouraged to participate in the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare Innovation proposed by Research Australia above.

What health impacts, risks and vulnerabilities should be prioritised for adaptation action through the Strategy? What process or methodology should be adopted to prioritise impacts, risks and vulnerabilities for adaptation action?

In public opinion polling undertaken by Roy Morgan in June 2023 on behalf of Research Australia, 40.4% of Australians reported that they had been impacted by climate change. 10.7% reported having a physical illness linked to climate change and 12.5% reported mental illness linked to climate change. 12.8% reported they had been affected by the impact of climate change on health services.

Clearly, both physical and mental illness are key risks associated with climate change where specific strategies for their mitigation can be developed.

In the same polling, 50.2% of respondents indicated they believed research into the effects of climate change on human health should be a higher priority for the Government than it is now.

Research Australia submits that we need research to identify effective programs to build resilience and address the impact of severe weather events on local populations. Funding for this research should be an action under the proposed National Health and Climate Strategy; it should not be pushed back to existing funding programs such as the NHMRC's Medical Research Endowment Account or the Medical Research Future Fund.

² <https://bond.edu.au/iebh>

For each of these enablers:

a) What is currently working well?

b) What actions should the Strategy consider to support delivery?

Research Australia supports the scan of current research activities pertaining to climate change and health proposed as an action for the enabler of research.

While the action is useful, what will happen with the results of the scan? We expect that it will identify additional areas where research needs to be funded but what will happen with this information?

Existing funding sources such as the NHMRC's Medical Research Endowment Account and the Medical Research Future Funds are already effectively fully committed.

Research Australia submits that providing funding for the research identified by the scan should be an additional action under the proposed National Health and Climate Strategy; it should not be pushed back to existing funding programs such as the NHMRC's Medical Research Endowment Account or the Medical Research Future Fund.

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ABOUT RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

Established with the assistance of the Federal Government in 2002, Research Australia is the national alliance representing the entire health and medical research (HMR) pipeline, from the laboratory to the patient and the marketplace. Research Australia works to position Australian HMR as a significant driver of a healthy population and a healthy economy.

Our vision: Research Australia envisions a world where Australia unlocks the full potential of its world-leading health and medical research sector to deliver the best possible healthcare and global leadership in health innovation.

Our mission: To use our unique convening power to position health and medical research as a significant driver of a healthy population and contributor to a healthy economy.

Our role:

Engage

Australia in a conversation about the health benefits and economic value of its investment in health and medical research.

Connect

researchers, funders and consumers to increase investment in health and medical research from all sources.

Influence

government policies that support effective health and medical research and its routine translation into evidence-based practices and better health outcomes

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