



## Climate change

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) recognise and acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as the traditional custodians, have cared for the land and environment for thousands of years before and hundreds of years since settlement. The land is a link between all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's existence; this includes spirituality, health, culture, language, family, lore and identity. Indigenous land and sea management, also referred to as 'caring for country', includes a wide range of environmental, natural resource and cultural heritage management activities<sup>1</sup>.

*'Climate change' refers to a change in climate attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is, in addition to natural climate variability, observed over comparable time periods<sup>2</sup>.*

Climate change is occurring due to human activities, in particular the large scale burning of fossil fuels for energy, which emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. To mitigate the effects of climate change, the international community, particularly the developed world, needs to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by transferring reliance on fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy production and reduce energy use per capita.

Human health and wellbeing is intrinsically connected to the quality of the natural environment. Humans are entirely dependent on a stable, habitable climate for food, water and comfortable living conditions. These staples of existence within our natural environment, are being threatened by climate change.

Many nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing\* are already affected both in their work and personal lives by the effects of climate change. As the largest component of the health care workforce, they are at the forefront of providing care to communities and individuals affected by climate change. Treatment of climate change-related health conditions are adding to the burden of an already stretched health care system. As professions grounded in science and as providers of health care, the nursing and midwifery professions are in a position to communicate with the public and within their workplaces about climate change and health.

Nurses and midwives are pivotal in leading the development of policy and influencing practices. Working in all areas of healthcare, nurses and midwives contribute to resilient health systems through research, adaptation planning, the identification of at-risk populations and participating in emergency planning and surge response. In both clinical and community health settings, nurses and midwives provide unique insight into practical sustainability and mitigation opportunities contained in energy and water efficiency, procurement, and waste management practices.

The ANMF supports action and initiatives that will address the challenges of climate change. To that end the ANMF is committed to net zero emissions by 2050.

### **It is the policy of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:**

1. Urgent action must be taken by government and all sectors of the community to: limit potential temperature increases by reducing and limiting the release of carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels into the atmosphere; implement non-fossil fuel sources of energy; and prepare the health sector to deal with existing and future health effects of climate change.

\*The term assistant in nursing also refers to care workers (however titled)



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2. As members of the community, nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing, should participate in the broader climate change debate, utilising their networks to communicate with politicians, the media and the community on the importance of reducing carbon emissions.
3. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing play a vital role within health and aged care facilities by identifying opportunities, shaping policy and bringing about lower emissions from service provision.
4. Research efforts must be encouraged to clarify and quantify both the negative health effects associated with climate change in order for the health sector to be able to understand and best respond to those health conditions as they arise; and the health and wellbeing benefits of climate change mitigation in order to take advantage of preventive health strategies and opportunities.
5. Climate change needs to be understood as a public health issue and, as such, must be incorporated in undergraduate and postgraduate nursing and midwifery curricula. The existing and future nursing and midwifery workforce should be educated to understand and respond to health conditions related to climate change.
6. Employers should:
  - a) acknowledge and support nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing involved in environment and sustainability groups in their workplaces to bring about efficient and sustainable practices;
  - b) support nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to implement sound and viable climate change initiatives;
  - c) showcase the efforts and successes of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing who have brought about environmentally sustainable workplace practices;
  - d) ensure there is a management team tasked specifically with implementing sustainable environmental practices and that nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing can fully participate;
  - e) ensure that health, disability and aged care facility service delivery accreditation standards specify sustainable environmental standards for procurement, energy efficiency, water use and waste management;
  - f) ensure that sustainable planning, design and construction of new health care facilities and retrofitting of existing facilities is standard practice;
  - g) consult with nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to ensure planning accommodates the resources required to implement sustainable practice;
  - h) ensure that environmental sustainability drives procurement criteria;
  - i) seek feedback on procurement decisions from nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing;
  - j) endorse the ten sustainability goals outlined in the Global Green and Health Hospitals Agenda. These goals include: Leadership; Chemicals; Waste; Energy; Water; Transportation; Food; Pharmaceuticals; Buildings; and Purchasing<sup>3</sup>.



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- k) identify, facilitate, resource and implement environmentally sustainable practices that support the ten sustainability goals outlined in the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Agenda;
- l) ensure nurses and midwives are involved when conducting risk assessments, emergency and surge workforce planning activities.

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Reviewed and re-endorsed May 2021*

References

- 1 Australians Together (2021). *The importance of land*. Available at <https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/the-importance-of-land/>
- 2 United Nations (1992). *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. Geneva: UN. Available at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>
- 3 Karliner, J and Guenther, R (2011). *Global green and health hospitals agenda: a comprehensive environmental health agenda for hospitals and health systems around the world*. Health Care without Harm. Available at <https://www.hospitalesporlasaludambiental.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Global-Green-and-Healthy-Hospitals-Agenda.pdf>

This policy should be read in conjunction with the ANMF Health and the environment Policy and the ANMF Primary health care Position Statement.