



## Climate change

*'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>1</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.

Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing will be 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 workforce. 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 in their workplace to improve energy and water efficiency, procurement, and waste management practices.

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

1. Urgent action needs to 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.
2. As members of the community, nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing, need to 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 have an important role to play within health and aged care facilities to identify opportunities, shape policy and bring about lower emissions from service provision.
4. Research efforts must be focussed on clarifying and quantifying 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.
5. The existing and future nursing and midwifery workforce should be educated to understand and respond to health conditions related to climate change. Climate change needs to be understood as a public health issue and, as such, must be incorporated in undergraduate and post graduate nursing and midwifery curricula.



6. Employers should:
- 6.1 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;
  - 6.2 support nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to implement sound and viable climate change initiatives;
  - 6.3 showcase the efforts and successes of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to bring about environmentally sustainable workplace practices;
  - 6.4 ensure there is a management team tasked specifically with implementing sustainable environmental practices and that nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing can fully participate;
  - 6.5 ensure that health and aged care facility service delivery accreditation standards specify sustainable environmental standards for procurement, energy efficiency, water use and waste management;
  - 6.6 ensure that sustainable planning, design and construction of new health care facilities and retrofitting of existing facilities is standard practice;
  - 6.7 ensure that environmental sustainability drives procurement criteria;
  - 6.8 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>ii</sup>.
  - 6.9 identify, facilitate, resource and implement environmentally sustainable practices that support the ten sustainability goals outlined in the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Agenda.

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#### References

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. United National Convention on Climate Change (UNCCC). FCCC/INFORMAL/84 GE.05-62220 (E) 200705. Geneva: UN, 1992. <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Karliner, J and Guenther, R. *Global green and health hospitals agenda: a comprehensive environmental health agenda for hospitals and health systems around the world*. Health Care without Harm, 2011. Available at <https://www.greenhospitals.net/sustainability-goals/>

This policy relates to the following ANMF policies:

- Health and the Environment
- Primary Health Care