



## **The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) declares climate change a medical emergency**

**(Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2019):** The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ), Australia's peak body representing respiratory health professionals, is today releasing a 'Declaration on Climate Change', joining other national and international health organisations<sup>1</sup> in calling climate change a medical emergency.

"It is logical and reasonable for us, as respiratory health professionals, to act on the strength of the evidence before us. And the evidence is clear: climate change is a medical emergency that is already impacting the health of our patients," said TSANZ President Professor Bruce Thompson.

"TSANZ is therefore calling on our members and governments at all levels, including the Commonwealth of Australia and the New Zealand Government, to take immediate and sustained action to address and mitigate the impacts of this climate emergency," he said.

Temperature rise, sea level rise and unstable and unseasonal weather patterns including wildfires are now worse than originally predicted. Without significant and immediate action, even aggressive measures will be unlikely to prevent a 2-4°C rise in temperature. The world-wide changes in weather patterns that will follow, including in Australia, pose wide-ranging adverse effects on health, including a serious threat to respiratory health.

Studies have established that the changes occurring in climate contribute to poor air quality and further exacerbate lung health risks. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates 7 million people die prematurely every year due to air pollution. Here in NSW, recent fire related pollution has resulted in NSW Ambulance fielding some 2330 calls for help with asthma or breathing difficulties over a single week - 30 per cent more than an average week - and, over the same period, hospitals across the state have had a 25 per cent increase in emergency department presentations for respiratory issues.

However, catastrophic climate change is not inevitable. The new report "[Clean Air Now,](#)" co-authored by the International Forum of Respiratory Societies ([FIRS](#)) and the NCD Alliance ([NCDA](#)), documents the success of cost effective actions to achieve quick results for cleaner air. In particular, the rapid phase-out of health harmful subsidies for fossil fuels,

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<sup>1</sup> Nationally: the AMA (Australian Medical Association), the RACP (Royal Australasian College of Physicians), the ACEM (Australasian College of Emergency Medicine), Doctors for the Environment Australia and the ACRRM (Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine) have all declared climate change a medical emergency. This follows international statements from the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the British Medical Association, and the World Health Organisation.

and the redirection of investment into accessible alternatives including clean transport and renewable energy have a significant impact. TSANZ is therefore urging Australia, as one of the world's largest fossil fuel exporters, to immediately reduce its fossil fuel exports. With this action, Australia has an opportunity to have an immediate and significant impact on global carbon emissions and air pollution.

On an individual level, reducing waste, reusing/recycling, investing in photovoltaic energy systems (preferably with storage), walking/cycling where possible or using public transport are all steps we can take. Choice in banks and investments such as superannuation products also matter: making a switch to providers that don't invest in fossil-fuel industries increases the financial incentive to move to renewables. Consider supporting charities that support education and action to address climate change.

"In making this declaration, TSANZ is joining leading, evidence-based international and national health bodies. As health professionals we are committed to protecting the health of our patients and in the face of this medical emergency, we are calling for a proportional, emergency response. This requires action from us as individuals, and from the governments we elect. We can no longer continue with business as usual," said Professor Thompson.

#### **Health organisations declaring climate change an emergency**

The Australian Medical Association (AMA)

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP)

The Australasian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM)

Doctors for the Environment Australia

The Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)

The American Medical Association

The American College of Physicians

The British Medical Association

The World Health Organization

#### **ABOUT TSANZ**

The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) is the only health peak body representing a range of professions (medical specialists, scientists, researchers, academics, nurses, physiotherapists, students and others) across various disciplines within the respiratory/sleep medicine field in Australia and New Zealand. TSANZ is a Health Promotion Charity. TSANZ is committed to serving the professional needs of its members by improving knowledge and understanding of lung disease, with the ultimate goals being to prevent respiratory illness through research and health promotion and to improve health care for people with respiratory illness.

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