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Health implications of climate change: draft evidence summary

Dear Marc

Thank you for inviting the New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) to provide feedback on a draft evidence summary of the health impacts of climate change.

1. The NZMA is New Zealand's largest medical organisation, with more than 5,500 members from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and to promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders. Our submission has been informed by feedback from our Board and Advisory Councils, including a specialist in public health medicine. Most of our feedback on the draft resource is of a specific and/or technical nature and is provided by way of track changes and the comments function on the Word document (attached).
2. The NZMA believes that climate change is a serious and urgent threat to health and health equity in New Zealand and worldwide. The NZMA has endorsed the New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine's (NZCPHM) 2013 climate change policy statement.¹ The NZMA's own position statement on Health and Climate Change² draws on the NZCPHM statement as well as the 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change.³
3. We welcome the development of a resource by the Royal Society of New Zealand (RSNZ) on the health impacts of climate change and appreciate the opportunity to provide

¹ Available from http://www.nzcpmh.org.nz/media/85677/comms_version_-_climate_change_substantive_policy_v2_final.pdf

² Available from https://www.nzma.org.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/16984/NZMA-Position-Statement-on-Health-and-Climate-Change-FINAL_August-2015.pdf

³ Available from <http://thelancet.com/climate-and-health>

feedback on this important topic. We have concerns, however, with the process the RSNZ has used to develop this draft, as well as with the quality of the draft which we feel does not reflect the Society's usually high standards. We note that the expert reference group providing guidance to the RSNZ in authoring this document had only one expert on human health and climate change. We also note that the input of key health experts and organisations is only now being sought by the RSNZ. We feel that earlier and greater engagement with health professionals may have contributed to a significantly improved draft resource. Nevertheless, the NZMA welcomes the opportunity to input into the development of this resource at this stage. We note that the draft will be revised following feedback by experts and stakeholders before being sent for international review.

4. As it stands, there are several problems with the draft evidence summary. These include errors, omission of key issues and poor referencing (which makes reviewing the document difficult). With respect to errors, the opening sentence, for example, is wrong; the figure of 250,000 additional deaths is an annual death count estimate, not a 21-year cumulative count, which means the current wording understates the published estimate by a factor of 20. The reference relating to this sentence is also cited poorly.

5. A major concern is the draft resource's lack of attention to the impacts of climate change on the social determinants of health, as well as the impacts on equity. The health effects of climate change include many socially mediated impacts (eg, loss of livelihood, forced migration, economic vulnerability, food insecurity, increased risk of conflict). The social determinants are at least as, if not more than, important as the biological determinants when it comes to the impacts of climate change. The draft also does not consider the health co-benefits of measures to mitigate climate change.

6. Further specific feedback, including additional references to help the RSNZ address some of the omissions in the draft, is provided using track changes and the comments function on the Word document of the draft (attached). We also attach the NZMA's position statement on Health Equity which elaborates on the importance of the social determinants of health.

We hope our feedback is helpful and would welcome the opportunity to review a revised iteration of this resource. We would also be happy to help with the distribution of the final document. The NZMA appreciates the work the RSNZ is doing to improve understanding across key public policy areas and we hope we can continue to contribute to the development of relevant RSNZ resources.

Yours sincerely



Dr Stephen Child
NZMA Chair

Attachments

Royal Society of New Zealand. Health Impacts of Climate Change. Evidence Summary. Draft with track changes.

New Zealand Medical Association. Health Equity. Position Statement, 2011. Available from https://www.nzma.org.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1456/Health-equity-2011.pdf