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Impact of climate change on public health recognised in the federal budget

The Australian Medical Association and Doctors for the Environment Australia say the federal government’s budget commitment to establish a National Health Sustainability and Climate Unit is a big win in the fight to reduce health sector emissions.

The organisations welcomed the government’s commitment to fund a National Health and Climate Strategy, allocating \$3.4 million over four years (and \$0.7 million per year ongoing) to develop the strategy and establish the Unit.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said the health system needs to do its part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and establishing the unit is a welcome first step. Australia’s healthcare system contributes to 7 per cent of Australia’s carbon emissions.

Professor Robson also said a National Health and Climate Strategy is imperative to start systemically addressing the health impacts of climate change.

“It is our patients and communities that are affected. It is doctors who provide trusted, sensitive and life-saving care, both in the short and longer term. It is our workplaces — our health facilities — that are impacted when things go wrong, and we need to be equipped appropriately.

“The work that has been done behind the scenes by the AMA and DEA and other stakeholders to get the strategy and unit funded has been enormous,” Professor Robson said.

DEA Chair Dr John Van Der Kallen said he looked forward to working with the government as it established the unit and to contributing to the National Health and Climate Strategy.

“Establishing this unit and a strategy is a first step towards the health care system achieving net zero emissions by 2040, with an interim goal of an 80 per cent reduction by 2030 — a commitment that the AMA and DEA has led.

“From this unit, the AMA and DEA want to see all health departments across Australia working together to reduce emissions and elevate sustainable practices in health care.

“There is rapidly growing support in the health profession for the Australian healthcare sector to significantly reduce its carbon footprint and be a leader in environmentally sustainable healthcare.

“This is not limited to decreasing energy use and waste, but extends to better procurement decisions, improved infrastructure and planning, public and preventive health care, and innovative care pathways.

“The AMA and DEA look forward to continuing to work with the government to implement these important initiatives,” Dr Van Der Kallen said.

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