

Five medical colleges call for plan to phase out coal by 2030

Five medical colleges from across Australia and New Zealand, with more than 56,000 members, have written to federal, state and territory leaders and energy companies to call for a plan to protect Australians from the impacts of air pollution and climate change by adopting orderly plans to replace coal with renewable energy by 2030 in a way that shares the benefits of renewable energy and supports communities through the energy transition.

The letter follows a call from the World Health Organization for all OECD countries to phase out coal by 2030 in light of the harms posed by air pollution and actions needed globally to limit warming to 1.5 degrees.

“The Royal Australian College of GPs recognises climate change as a public health emergency and GPs across Australia are already seeing the impacts, such as the tragic 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires which devastated many communities and had a lasting impact on peoples’ health and wellbeing. It’s vital that energy companies and all levels of government do everything they can to replace coal with renewable energy as soon as possible, we have no time to lose,” said Adj. Prof. Karen Price, President of the Royal Australian College of GPs.

The letter draws attention to the contribution of coal-burning power stations to regional and urban air pollution, known to increase the risks of asthma, chronic bronchitis, ischaemic heart disease and affect pregnancy outcomes.

“RANZCO joins our medical colleagues calling for leadership from the Federal Government on decarbonising our society and building resilience to drought, fire, floods and heat stress, as a coordinated national response can effect meaningful change for healthier livelihoods in Australia,” said Prof. Nitin Verma, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists.

“We know that changes in our climate are increasing the likelihood and severity of natural disasters, directly impacting the mental health of individuals and communities. This highlights the urgent need for a set of comprehensive policy responses at the health service, network and government levels. Capacity development across mental health and the wider health system will be fundamental to addressing these challenges,” said A/Prof. Vinay Lakra, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

“Governments, institutions and individuals must take responsibility to address the reversible causes of climate change and introduce policies to reduce environmental degradation for the benefit of current and future generations,” said Dr Benjamin

Bopp, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

The letter builds on previous calls for the Federal Government to commit to stronger 2030 targets, implement and fund a national strategy for climate change and health, establish a dedicated climate change health and resilience fund to support research and innovation and build capacity in the healthcare sector to deal with the growing impacts of climate change.

The open letter has been endorsed by the:

- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP)
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG)
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO)
- Australasian College of Sports and Exercise Physicians (ACSEP)

