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IGNORING IPCC REPORT RISKS HEALTH OF AUSTRALIANS, AMA WARNS

Relying on science for COVID response has served us well, so climate science should be no different, AMA says

The AMA is alarmed at the IPCC’s latest findings on dangerously rising global temperatures and is warning government inaction on climate change risks the health of Australians.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid has called for the government to listen to and act on the scientific findings of climate experts, as it has relied on medical experts to respond to COVID-19.

The IPCC’s *Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis*, released yesterday, provides new estimates of the chances of crossing the global warming level of 1.5°C in the next decades. It finds that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach.

“The IPCC has sounded the alarm on rising global temperatures and ignoring the clear evidence of rapid increases in global temperatures will ultimately affect the health and wellbeing of Australians,” Dr Khorshid said.

“Climate change is a health emergency and as we have seen with the COVID emergency, the best way to deal with it is to listen to the science and act on the evidence and advice of the experts.

“Doctors are frustrated by the slow pace of the Australian Government’s response to climate change, and while it has relied on science to direct its policy responses during the pandemic, it’s reluctant to embrace the science on climate change. It’s clear we need a more ambitious response, including significant emissions reductions efforts.

“As we see the fires caused by extreme heat raging in Greece and California, Australians remember their own experiences just 18 months ago when bushfires caused tragic deaths, injuries, respiratory problems, increased stress and anxiety. Heat exhaustion also leads to a range of health problems doctors are seeing increasingly frequently in their practices.

“Climate change is causing increases in extreme weather, which can lead to death, food insecurity, and mental ill-health. Floods like those we saw in Germany and Belgium just weeks ago also carry the risk of water-borne and infectious diseases.

“The purpose of the IPCC’s work is to provide everyone, particularly governments, with the information needed to make decisions and show leadership on climate change. The latest findings are out. Climate change is affecting every region of the planet, but strong and sustained reductions in greenhouse gases can limit the damage in the decades ahead, with immediate benefits for air quality.

“There’s no time left to lose. Further delays on driving down emissions will have a negative impact on the health of Australians,” Dr Khorshid said.

The AMA believes health problems will only worsen with further temperature rises, and along with the AMA's call to the Australian Government to take a number of actions to address climate change, Dr Khorshid said the health sector has also been put on notice.

“We all have to do our bit and we're challenging ourselves; the healthcare sector, to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2040. Through our MOU with Doctors for the Environment Australia, we're holding ourselves accountable through adopting practical policy goals that we know will make a difference.

“We're asking the government to set out a clear transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, to prepare and support communities affected by climate disasters with a national strategy for health and climate change and for a national Sustainable Development Unit to reduce carbon emissions in the healthcare sector,” Dr Khorshid said.

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