



Renal Society of Australasia



Position Statement

Environmental Sustainability & Kidney Care

March 2023

Summary

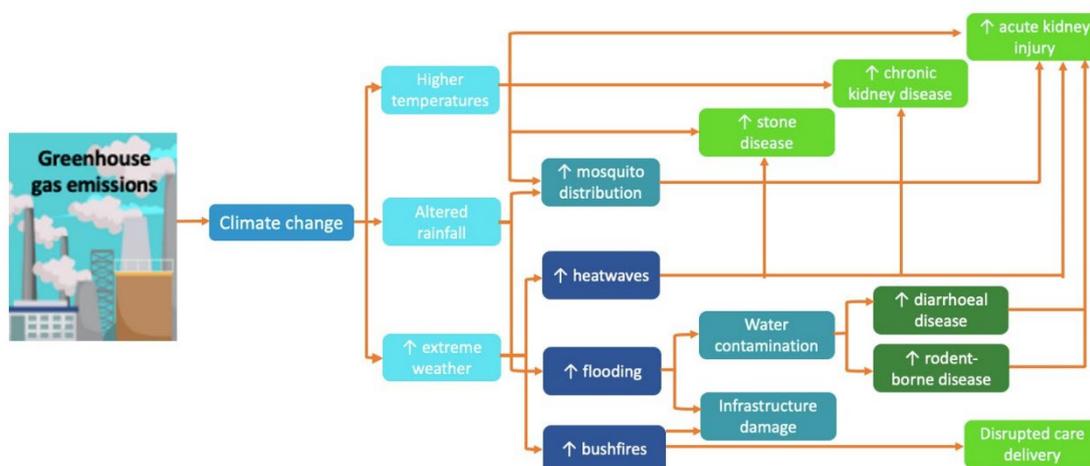
The Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology (ANZSN), the Renal Society of Australasia (RSA), and Kidney Health New Zealand (KHNZ) recognise the enormity of the threat that climate and other environmental change pose to human health, including kidney health. Given the high carbon emissions, resource consumption and waste generation profile of healthcare, there is imperative for the healthcare sector to act urgently and broadly to minimise its environmental impact.

This position statement affirms the commitment of our organisations to:

- 1) Address our own environmental impact, and
- 2) through education, research, and advocacy, drive the necessary transformation to environmentally sustainable kidney care in Australia and New Zealand

Background

Climate change, resource consumption and waste generation are issues that increasingly threaten human health and wellbeing.¹⁻⁴ Indeed, climate change is recognised as the greatest health threat facing humanity this century.^{1,2} Its effects on health are broad and mediated through increases in extreme weather events; altered distributions of vector-borne and other climate-sensitive diseases; reductions in crop yields, fish stocks and freshwater availability; and social unrest and population displacement.^{1,2} The risks climate change poses to kidney health and care delivery are also broad and expected to escalate over coming decades.⁵



Yet simultaneously, the delivery of healthcare causes substantial environmental harm. In Australia, healthcare is responsible for over 7% of total carbon emissions,⁶ while in New Zealand this figure is estimated to be between 3-8%.⁷ Healthcare is also a major producer of waste and contributes to water depletion and pollution of air and soils. Within our health system, the environmental burden of kidney care, particularly dialysis, is disproportionately high, with drivers of this including the large water, power and consumable usage, the waste generation by dialysis systems and the repeated nature of dialysis treatments often for the lifetime of patients.⁵

Australia and New Zealand are signatories to the Paris Climate Agreement, the goal of which is to limit global warming to well below 2 compared to pre-industrial levels.⁸ To achieve this and thereby avoid the worst health impacts of climate change, global greenhouse gas emissions must reduce by 7.6% every year between 2020 and 2030.⁹⁻¹¹ As a high emitting sector and one with a duty to protect health, healthcare must show leadership in decarbonisation and minimising other forms environmental harm.

Importantly, the changes needed to improve environmental sustainability in healthcare overlap considerably with those needed to deliver financial sustainability and quality improvements, entailing efficiency driven by evidence-based practices and judicious use of resources.⁹ National and international experience have demonstrated broad benefits of environmental initiatives within the healthcare sector, including the kidney care sector.⁵

The ANZSN is committed to proactive action to minimise the health impacts of climate and other environmental change. This includes taking measures to improve the carbon footprint and overall environmental performance of our organisation; supporting our members in obtaining environment-health literacy and undertaking environmental improvement activities; and advocating for ambitious national leadership to achieve a safe climate-health future.

Calls to action:

Organisational

The ANZSN and KHNZ are committed to the following:

- Achieving net zero carbon emissions from organisational activities by 2030
- Continuing to adhere to socially and environmentally responsible investing, including avoiding fossil fuel investments
- Promoting and advocating for broad implementation of the ANZSN's Environmentally Sustainable Design Guidelines for Kidney Care Facilities
- Continuing to work towards minimising the environmental impact of conferences and meetings through implementation of the ANZSN Sustainable Event Guide
- Promoting and profiling 'green nephrology' through the inclusion of educational programs at conferences and other educational events
- Supporting our community to undertake environmental research to advance the evidence base for environmentally sustainable kidney care, including through promoting the ANZSN and RSA environmental research prizes
- Continuing to support and grow the activities of the ANZSN Environmental Sustainability Committee

- Actively contributing to international collaborative efforts in the field of ‘green nephrology’.

Members

The organisations call on their members to:

- Educate themselves about the bidirectional relationship between kidney care and the environment, including through engaging with relevant educational events and utilising the resources available on the websites
- Establish departmental ‘green groups’ to drive local environmental sustainability changes
- Promote and encourage implementation of ANZSN’s Environmentally Sustainable Design Guidelines for Kidney Care Facilities at the local level
- Actively engage with manufacturers and suppliers to encourage more environmentally friendly products and equipment, together with supporting recycling programs and facilities to actively recycle waste, in particular plastic consumables
- Adhere to rational and considered prescribing and use of investigative and therapeutic interventions, including applying the ‘Choosing Wisely’ recommendations on low value care
- Streamline delivery of care and reduce duplication of services between health care providers and health care sectors
- Preferentially utilise electronic communications and telehealth where appropriate.

Government

The organisations call for government bodies to:

- Strengthen efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions this decade
- Support the Australian and New Zealand healthcare sectors to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2040, with an interim emissions reduction target of 80% by 2030
- Establish a National Healthcare Sustainability Unit to establish environmental metrics, set targets and coordinate efforts at national, state, and regional levels
- Develop national climate and health strategies for Australia and New Zealand

Resources

ANZSN

<https://nephrology.edu.au/#aboutus>

Environmental Environmentally Sustainable Design Guidelines for Kidney Care Facilities
Sustainable Event Guide

RACP

<https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/policy-and-advocacypriorities/climate-change-and-health>

<https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/environmentally-sustainable-healthcare->

[position-statement.pdf](#)

https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/climate-change-and-australias-healthcare-systems-a-review-of-literature-policy-and-practice.pdf?sfvrsn=efe8c61a_6

ASN

<https://www.asn-online.org/policy/webdocs/22.4.22StatementOnClimateChange.pdf>

Doctors for the Environment Australia

<https://dea.org.au/>

Health Care without Harm

<https://noharm.org/>

The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change

<https://www.thelancet.com/countdown-health-climate>

Evolve

<https://evolve.edu.au/home>

Choosing Wisely Australia

<https://www.choosingwisely.org.au/>

Wiser Healthcare

<https://www.wiserhealthcare.org.au/>

References

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6. Malik, A. et al., The carbon footprint of Australian health care. *The Lancet Planetary Health.* **2**, e27-e35 (2018)
7. New Zealand Government. Healthcare sector committed to reducing carbon footprint. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/healthcare-sector-committed-reducing-carbon-footprint> (2018) [cited 30 September 2022]
8. Doctors for the Environmental Australia: Net zero carbon emissions: responsibilities, pathways and opportunities for the Australian Healthcare sector. https://dea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/DEA-Net-Zero-report_v11.pdf (2020) [cited 30 September 2022]
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11. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Global Warming of 1.5°C. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> (2018) [cited 30 September 2022]
12. Choosing wisely Australia. Recommendations. The Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology. <https://www.choosingwisely.org.au/recommendations/ANZSN> (2021) [cited 30 September 2022]
13. Australian Medical Association. Joint statement - Medical Professionals call for emissions reduction in health care. <https://www.ama.com.au/media/joint-statement-medical-professionals-call-emissions-reduction-health-care> (2021) [cited 30 September 2022]