

# Position Statement on Climate Change

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**Note:** This position statement should be read in conjunction with the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association Policy on *Nursing and Midwifery and the Environment*.

Climate change is now recognised as a global public health problem and the future nursing and midwifery workforce will be practicing during a period when the health impacts of climate change are likely to be significant.

The health and hospitals sector is recognised as a major emitter of carbon and nurses and midwives represent a large proportion of that workforce. Nurses and midwives are in a position to contribute to efforts to reduce carbon emissions through everyday nursing decisions.

## **The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association recognises that:**

- Climate change has emerged as a new threat to public health and poses many challenges for nurses and midwives in light of the impact on people's health and the impact of climate change on health systems and health care delivery.
- Climate change will affect the pattern of diseases and deaths from exposure to high or low temperatures and result in increased climate sensitive risks. As a result it is anticipated that diseases and illnesses such as diarrhoea, malnutrition, malaria, dengue, heat stress, and the number of people killed or injured in coastal floods will be higher. There will be greater frequency of infectious disease epidemics following floods and storms, and substantial health effects following population displacement due to sea level rise and increased storm activity. Prolonged droughts are known to impact on mental health and there are health consequences of ozone depletion including increase in skin cancer and cataracts. Extreme weather patterns will have serious impact including drought, heat wave, floods and other events and be key determinants of global food crisis leading to hunger, malnutrition, political instability, disease and death<sup>1</sup>.
- Nurses and midwives should contribute to influencing practices in their workplaces to improve energy and water efficiency, procurement, and waste management practices.

## **The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association adopts the position that:**

- Nurses and midwives should support and participate in measures to mitigate the impact of climate change on the population with a focus on groups particularly vulnerable to disease and injury, and extreme conditions of heat and cold, including the socially isolated, the young and elderly, the poor and those without access to primary health care<sup>1,2</sup>.
- Nurses and midwives should participate in the broader climate change debate by utilising their networks to communicate with politicians, the media and the community on the importance of reducing carbon emissions to promote optimal health outcomes<sup>4</sup>.
- The nursing and midwifery workforce should be educated to understand and provide care associated with diseases and health conditions that will result from climate change.



- Nurses and midwives should support purchasing decisions that favour energy efficient and environmentally sustainable products for use in health services.
- Nurses and midwives should be involved in initiatives that raise awareness of the health implications of climate change.
- The NSWNMA should co-operate with other health profession organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs) to exert pressure on governments to implement policies that address climate change.
- The NSWNMA is committed to supporting sustainable health care practices in hospitals and community facilities as a member of the Global Green & Healthy Hospitals (GGHH) Network which is a project of Health Care Without Harm<sup>5</sup>.

**Notes:**

1. & 2. Adlong W., & Dietsch, E. (2015), Nursing and climate change: An emerging connection. *Collegian*, vol 22, issue1: 19-24.
3. The Silent Killer: Climate Change and the Health Impacts of Extreme Heat. Published by the Climate Council of Australia Ltd, 2016.
4. What the Climate & Health Alliance (CAHA) is About; <http://caha.org.au/about/>
5. GGHH Connect: <https://gghhconnect.cisconetspace.com/>