

Climate Change Contribution Consultation

The New Zealand Medical Student's Association (NZMSA) welcomes the chance to submit on New Zealand's post-2020 climate change contribution. We believe climate change is a serious threat to New Zealand and that our Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) should reflect this.

The NZMSA represents the close to 2,000 medical students located in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Our members are the future doctors and health sector leaders of New Zealand and will be among those dealing with the impact of climate change over the coming decades.

Climate change is a significant threat to health but some pathways to emissions reduction also have significant health benefits that the NZMSA believes should be taken into account.

Climate change will have significant health impacts

The potential health consequences of not taking action on climate change are significant. These effects include but are not limited to¹:

- An increase in infectious diseases
- Environmental changes exacerbating respiratory and cardiovascular conditions
- Health effects of inadequate access to fresh water
- Population migration within New Zealand and from other countries that will impact our current health system

The NZMSA also recognises that the impacts of these effects will be felt disproportionately by groups of low socioeconomic status (SES). In the assessment of costs and benefits of the INDC, health and fairness must be included as measures in order to take these facts into account.

We will face the impact of climate change within our lifetimes

Our members will be the generation that will have to make the inevitable tough decisions about how to respond to climate change. As such we strongly advocate for strong preventative action by reducing carbon emissions. This will make the circumstances our members will have to face in the future somewhat less difficult.

¹Climate change and human health: Impact and adaptation issues for New Zealand. Howden-Chapman P, Chapman R, Hales S, Britton E, Wilson N. 2010. In: Climate change adaptation in New Zealand: Future scenarios and some sectoral perspectives. Nottage, R.A.C, Wratt, D.S, Bornman, J.F, Jones, K. (eds). New Zealand Climate Change Centre, Wellington, pp 112-121.

Taking significant action has major health co-benefits for New Zealand

The NZMSA sees the significant health co-benefits that taking action on climate change will have for New Zealand. The potential to reduce New Zealand's chronic disease burden through the INDC must not be overlooked. These include²:

- An increase in active transport through improved infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport, which will not only reduce CO₂ emissions, but also will improve physical activity, reduce air pollution and traffic injuries.
- Healthy eating, especially decreased red meat and animal fat consumption will reduce levels of cardiovascular disease and bowel cancer.
- Improving housing through energy efficient means such as improved insulation will provide New Zealanders with warmer drier homes and will decrease respiratory disease associated with cold, damp housing.
- Moving away from the use of fossil fuels will reduce levels of air pollution which are damaging to the health of New Zealanders.

The sooner that we act, the more that these health benefits will mitigate the costs involved with taking these actions. Given the size and growth of government health expenditure, the economic benefits to reducing chronic disease will be very significant. As such we strongly advocate that they be taken into account when calculating the costs and benefits of action.

The actions that have been taken by the government to reduce emissions up until now have failed to curb emissions growth. The NZMSA would like to see targets set that will have meaningful effects to change our current path towards serious negative impacts on our climate, environment and the future health of New Zealand. A commitment to a global and New Zealand zero net carbon target by 2050 is both a fair and ambitious aim that will have benefits to us beyond that of minimising the inevitable rise in global temperature.

The NZMSA's members have a vested interest in the decisions made about New Zealand's INDC. We wish to remind the government of the role of climate change in the future health of our country. We believe the INDC should reflect both the health co-benefits gained by New Zealand by taking significant and timely action, and the health consequences of not committing to these actions.

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² Health and equity impacts of climate change in Aotearoa-New Zealand, and health gains from climate action. Hayley Bennett, Rhys Jones, Gay Keating, Alistair Woodward, Simon Hales, Scott Metcalfe. In: New Zealand Medical Journal. 28th November 2014, Volume 127 Number 1406.