

Human Health and Social Impacts Node

Governing the Health Impacts of Climate Change in New South Wales



Limited attention has been paid to the legal and institutional contexts within which climate-related health risks and impacts are governed, and the roles and responsibilities of various public actors in protecting human health from climate change.

Climate change has direct (e.g. through extreme weather events) and indirect impacts (e.g. through poor water quality) on health. Although research scholarship has improved our understanding of environmental hazard exposures and likely climate-related health risks, limited attention has been paid to the legal and institutional contexts within which these risks and impacts will be governed, and the key points of decision-making under existing legislative frameworks.

The project seeks to fill this gap by analysing the adequacy of our legal frameworks in protecting human health from climate change, focusing on the 'frontline' legislative frameworks for public health, emergency management and environmental protection in New South Wales.

It will map and describe the key regulations relevant to important environmental and climatic exposures of concern within New South Wales, such as heat, bushfire, air pollution, other extreme weather events, sea-level rise, dust and drought. By focusing on frontline legislative frameworks, the project will inform stakeholders and decision makers of the most immediate regulatory responses to those exposures, describe relevant statutory roles, responsibilities and interactions and identify significant gaps in the system.

Research outcomes

- A written report that:
 - describes the existing legal and governance arrangements of immediate relevance to the governance of climate-change-related health risks, focusing on key points of decision-making under the existing legislative frameworks for public health, emergency management and environmental protection in New South Wales
 - assesses whether legislative frameworks are fit for purpose and provide an effective model for governing climate change impacts on health
 - provides recommendations to assist in the development of governance arrangements that will strengthen the NSW Government's response to health impacts of climate change.
- The written report will provide a basis for further research that seeks to understand the role of law and governance in securing health and wellbeing in the context of climate change.

Who will use this information?

- NSW state and local governments
- Local health districts
- Key policy officers outside of New South Wales
- The Commonwealth Government
- Non-government organisations (e.g. the Climate and Health Alliance, Royal Australasian College of Physicians and Doctors for the Environment)
- Researchers

Human Health and Social Impacts Node

Building on current sources of health and climate change information, the Human Health and Social Impacts Node supports the NSW Government by:

1. delivering robust, sector-specific information targeting the health system, vulnerable communities and government agencies
2. establishing baselines for monitoring, evaluation and analysis of adaptation programs that seek to protect and promote health, and strengthen the delivery of health services, in the face of a changing climate
3. improving understanding of vulnerability in the context of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity
4. providing practical information on building resilience in communities and in the health sector.

The work program of the Node is informed by eco-social understandings of relationships between climate change and health. The approach taken acknowledges the range of environmental, social and economic consequences of climate change, including regional variation in impacts and vulnerability.

The Node is a partnership between:

- **NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment**
- **University of Sydney**
- **NSW Health**

For more information:

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