

Human Health and Social Impacts Node

Health and social indicators of environmental exposures



Research is lacking on the development and application of environmental health indicators in New South Wales.

Photo: Unsplash/Chuttersnap

Environmental health indicators are measures of the impact of the environment on health. There is little research on the development and application of environmental health indicators in New South Wales including the relevance of available environmental health indicators for evidence-based policy, the implications of underlying assumptions, and the impacts they have had on public health. This information is important for:

- monitoring population health
- informing health and environmental policy
- health service planning.

The burden of disease analysis measures the

combined impact of living with illness and injury (non-fatal burden) and dying prematurely (fatal burden). Environmental health indicators provide information on the health impacts and distribution of diseases due to environmental risk factors. Environmental burden of disease analyses are not only useful in monitoring population health, but also in measuring the health impact of interventions, and highlighting what to focus on when developing interventions (or which environmental risk factors are important to measure and monitor) to maximize the cost-effectiveness of programs and interventions.

The health burden of environmental risks is not evenly distributed across the population. For many environmental risk factors, vulnerable subgroups are at increased risk of exposure and health impacts. These subgroups included the young, elderly, persons with pre-existing disease and high socio-economic disadvantage populations. The identification of inequity in exposure and health burden is important in creating effective, targeted policy interventions.

This project will:

- develop an environmental health indicator monitoring and evaluation methodology
- produce a set of NSW environmental health indicators and associated burden estimates
- generate a report and associated journal paper with recommendations for further development.

Research outcomes

- A methodology for environmental health indicators that addresses NSW priority environmental health risks to inform policy.
- Identification of currently available data sources for environmental health indicators, including publicly available data, government agency collected data, and new data collection campaigns.
- Implementation of the environmental health indicators methodology to produce a set of indicators for New South Wales.

Who will use this information?

- Government (e.g. NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, NSW Health).
- 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:

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

More information

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