



Australasian College
for Emergency Medicine

Environmental Strategy

About

The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) is the not-for-profit organisation responsible for training emergency physicians and advancement of professional standards in emergency medicine in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our vision is to be the trusted authority for ensuring clinical, professional and training standards in the provision of quality, patient-focused emergency care.

Our mission is to promote excellence in the delivery of quality emergency care to all our communities through our committed and expert members.

Acknowledgements

ACEM acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which our Melbourne office is located. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

ACEM acknowledges Māori as tangata whenua and Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Public Health and Disaster Committee

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*Includes members from the 2018 to 2020 committee period

Foreword

The Public Health and Disaster Committee is pleased to share with you the ACEM Environmental Strategy. This strategy provides an overarching framework to guide the direction of ACEM in addressing climate change and its impacts on health. There has been a lot of advocacy work done in the background to advance ACEM sustainability and its vision for sustainable emergency departments. This sets out ACEM's vision to prepare emergency departments to mitigate and adapt to the deleterious impacts of climate change on human health. There is an accompanying Environmental Action Plan to go with this strategy. This is the beginning of a journey towards better sustainability for ACEM and healthcare systems.

In November 2019 at our Annual Scientific meeting, ACEM took the bold step to declare a climate health emergency, one the first medical colleges to do so. Since then we have made shifts towards being a more sustainable organisation, including through internal standards and by working with other colleges and non-governmental organisations in making statements on reducing air pollution, urging the government to reduce CO₂ emissions and introduce a climate change bill, all to make the community safer.

The climate emergency is already here, in overt form with unprecedented bushfires and smoke related illness in the summer of last year, but in more covert and lethal forms as well. More Australians have died from heat since 1900 than from all other natural disasters combined. We are also witnessing more extreme weather events happening all around the world, including flood and bushfire.

We have had scientific evidence of global warming of our climate for more than 30 years now. The excess human mortality of climate change is alarming but true¹. We are facing a public health emergency of global proportions, and one that disproportionately affects vulnerable groups – children, the elderly, the poor and Indigenous populations.

The Public Health and Disaster Committee is proud that ACEM has taken a stand to embed sustainable practices in the College and to support emergency departments to also strive for sustainability.

The emergency department is the frontline of the healthcare system. Climate change is a risk multiplier for extreme weather events and their accompanying natural disasters, and so too for our ability to provide appropriate care to the community.

Hospital emergency departments are already overflowing, and climate experts and fire chiefs have warned² how the future might look. But we can change the trajectory by acting definitively and with real targets. Such targets, such action can help to mitigate the health impacts of climate change.

Dr Lai Heng Foong
Chair Public Health and Disaster Committee

[1 The burden of heat-related mortality attributable to recent human-induced climate change](#)

[2 IPCC Climate Report: Profound changes are underway in earth's oceans and ice – a lead author explains what the warnings mean](#)

Introduction

The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) considers climate change and the associated health impacts to be a population health emergency. As a result of more frequent and intense climate events, climate change presents an immediate risk to the capacity and ability of emergency departments, health systems and the emergency medicine workforce to safely manage demand for care. ACEM recognises that emergency departments and hospitals need to be resourced and supported to respond to and manage increased presentations. Alongside this, ACEM actively supports efforts to minimise the impact of climate change, including through measures to reduce its carbon footprint, the carbon footprint of hospitals and health systems. Given the scale of climate change, ACEM recognises the vital need to support and partner with other organisations and actors to both mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Purpose

This document outlines ACEM's strategy to prepare for and mitigate the deleterious impacts of climate change on human health. This strategy aligns with the overall goals of the ACEM Business Plan and the ACEM Strategic Plan, which both identify the importance of ensuring that Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand emergency departments are prepared for and equipped to address the impacts of climate change.

ACEM's strategy is organised against six overarching priorities.

- Leadership
- Research
- Advocacy
- Partnerships
- Education
- Culture

Priorities

Leadership

Demonstrate leadership in enacting climate action to prevent and mitigate the impact of climate change. Emergency department directors can also be leaders within their healthcare service and systems, while clinicians have a role in leading by example within their workplaces.

Research

Develop an evidence base to accurately capture the impact of climate change on emergency departments and health systems. Such research will assist in the development of policies, guidelines and advocacy strategies.

Advocacy

Use ACEM's unique position as the peak professional body for emergency medicine to advocate to governments and healthcare providers on the impacts of climate change on emergency medicine and the capacity of health systems to manage demand. Emergency department directors and clinicians will lead and support these advocacy efforts with hospital management and at a state and national level, through the media and with members of parliament and government representatives.

Partnerships

Address the international climate emergency by seeking out effective partnerships at all levels to ensure the health system and communities are prepared for climate emergencies. Such actions will also support the transition to a carbon-free economy.

Education

Educate and prepare clinicians for the known and predicted effects of climate change. This would encompass education of College community, as well as the broader health workforce engaged in emergency care. Clinicians also have a role to play in ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills to respond to the climate emergency.

Culture

Develop a culture in emergency departments that normalises sustainability in all activities and policies and extends throughout an organisation and into the broader healthcare system.

Strategy

Leadership

- Members and trainees to lead climate action to prevent, mitigate and manage the impact of climate change on emergency care.
- Emergency physicians will lead the debate and set standards for sustainable health care in a climate emergency, with directors and their delegates demonstrating leadership to other departments and/or their healthcare organisation or as part of the larger healthcare organisation (e.g. Local Health District/ District Health Board).
- ACEM will continue to identify measures to reduce its carbon footprint and improve environmentally sustainable measures within the organisation. This will include a sustainability matrix that is applied to the development and review of all ACEM policies.

Research

- Build an evidence base to support education and advocacy activities in relation to the impact of climate change on emergency departments and the broader health system, particularly in the areas of workforce planning, patient demand and emergency department presentations.
- Recognise climate-induced disaster mitigation as part of the remit of emergency medicine and disaster planning.
- Support and conduct climate-related research projects as they relate to emergency medicine.

Advocacy

- Develop and partner in advocacy campaigns regarding disaster preparedness for emergency departments in the context of climate change and its impacts.
- Advocate for equity of access to timely and appropriate emergency care and equity of outcomes, with a focus on those who are most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change such as older people, First Nations peoples, people with pre-existing medical conditions and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Advocate for Choosing Wisely and other health resource stewardship initiatives to promote the effective use of limited healthcare resources.
- Ensure the College community is resourced to effectively advocate for emergency department preparedness in the context of climate change.

Partnerships

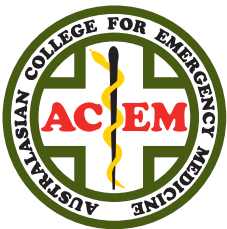
- Establish and further develop partnerships to support and strengthen ACEM's climate change activities, advocacy and research.
- Identify and support opportunities to partner with hospital and healthcare providers to further the adoption of sustainability principles in the decisions of health leaders.
- Encourage members, trainees, staff and the wider College community to participate in initiatives against climate change.

Education

- Educate the College community about climate change and sustainable activities.
- Ensure members and trainees understand the impact of climate change on emergency medicine and the effects on emergency department performance, and are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to plan, prepare and respond to climate change-related disasters.

Culture

- Grow and sustain a culture of sustainability in emergency medicine that is accountable to the broader community for its environmental and social impact.
- Foster a culture of Choosing Wisely and resource stewardship among leaders of emergency medicine to embed it into daily practice.



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