

CROAKEY HEALTH MEDIA

Our news and information ecosystem undermines climate action Submission to National Health and Climate Strategy

On 24 July, 2023, Croakey Health Media lodged a submission to the Department of Health and Aged Care consultation on the development of a National Health and Climate Strategy. The Department had asked for submissions to address 25 questions related to [a consultation paper](#).

Our submission (which can be viewed [in full here](#)) addressed only those questions relevant for a specific issue: the importance of the news and information ecosystem.

Below we provide an overview of our submission and the areas of the consultation paper to which it relates.

1. Consultation paper, Objectives

The paper proposes the following objectives:

It is proposed the Strategy includes the following objectives in support of this vision:

- 1. Measurement:** Measure and report on health system greenhouse gas emissions, so progress in reducing emissions can be tracked and quantified.
- 2. Mitigation:** Accelerate the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the health system
- 3. Adaptation:** Strengthen the resilience of the health system and communities to anticipate and respond to the health impacts of climate change.
- 4. Health in All Policies:** Maximise the synergies between good climate policy and public health policy by working across policy areas to lessen the impact of climate change on the social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing.

1.2. Croakey Health Media comments

The four objectives suggested for the strategy omit an important objective, which is central for achieving all other objectives: informed and engaged communities.

Objective 5: Informed and engaged communities

Communities need to be informed and engaged in mitigation and adaptation efforts, and especially in relation to their health and wellbeing. When communities are informed and engaged, policy development and implementation is more likely to be relevant, equitable, effective and useful. This

is particularly relevant for health and aged care services and providers that are trying to engage with climate mitigation and adaptation.

The news and information ecosystem currently does not support communities to be informed about and engaged with climate mitigation and adaptation. The prevalence of climate misinformation and disinformation, the dominance of corporate interests with a vested interest in undermining climate literacy and climate action (including fossil fuel companies and corporate media organisations such as News Corp), the power of digital platforms such as Meta and Google (which are major vectors of climate misinformation and disinformation) and a weakening of the public interest journalism sector (leaving many communities without access to reliable local news) all have contributed to harmful delays in the implementation of effective climate action.

As a result of these delays, communities will increasingly bear the burden of climate disruption affecting wide-ranging determinants of health, including access to food, housing, and safe living conditions. Communities will have less capacity for responding to the increasing intensity and prevalence of extreme weather events if they are not supported by reliable, relevant and safe news and information systems.

2. Consultation paper, Principles

The consultation paper proposes the following principles inform pursuit of the strategy's objectives.

- 1. First Nations leadership:** First Nations knowledge and experience must be central to decision-making on climate and health policy at all levels.
- 2. Tackling health inequities:** A health equity approach recognises some populations are more vulnerable to and have less capacity to adapt to the health impacts of climate change, and that responses to climate change need to take account of disparities in health outcomes.
- 3. Population health and prevention:** The response of the health system, and society more generally, to climate change must be underpinned by a public health perspective. This recognises that prevention of disease and maintenance of good health across the lifespan, in combination with optimal secondary and tertiary prevention, assists both mitigation and adaptation.
- 4. One Health:** The Strategy will be underpinned by the principle of One Health – recognising the connection that exists between the health of people, animals and the environment.
- 5. Evidence-informed policymaking:** The response to climate change must be based on the best available data, evidence and research – but we must also be willing to take action on a prudent and precautionary basis in the face of uncertainty and incomplete information. Where possible, actions should be prioritised based on the principles of cost-effectiveness analysis, considering

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work and travel upon, and to the Elders, past, present and future.*

where resources can be allocated to maximise population health gains, while also taking account of health inequities and rights-based approaches.

6. Partnership-based working across all levels of government and beyond:

All levels of government need to work closely with each other, as well as with communities, patients, First Nations, not-for-profit organisations, peak bodies, private industry and education and research institutions to craft and implement a holistic and nationally consistent response to climate change.

2.1. Croakey Health Media comments

The Croakey Health Media submission states that the six proposed principles all are relevant for the proposed additional objective.

First Nations leadership. This principle is also important for developing and supporting reliable, relevant and safe information and news systems. We note also the leadership of the Koori Mail newspaper in supporting communities in the aftermath of flooding in 2022.

Tackling health inequities. Privileging the voices, knowledge and experiences of those most likely to experience adverse outcomes from climate disruption is foundational to preventing and addressing health inequities. Equitable access to reliable, relevant and safe information and news systems supports this principle.

Population health and prevention. This means ensuring communities have reliable, relevant news and information for preventing and addressing health concerns during an era of escalating climate disruption.

One Health. The dominant understanding of health in the community is very individualistic. It does not generally encompass planetary health or One Health concepts. Again, this illustrates the importance of ensuring communities have access to reliable, relevant news and information so they are empowered to contribute to mitigation and adaptation within these more holistic concepts.

Evidence-informed policy making. Governments are often reluctant to implement evidence-informed policies, especially in the areas of climate mitigation and adaptation, if they do not perceive strong community support for such policies. This underscores the importance of ensuring reliable, relevant and safe news and information systems that will help inform and engage communities in supportive, effective, equitable policies.

Partnership-based working across all levels of government and beyond. This principle underscores the importance of collaboration across sectors, silos and jurisdictions. Reliable, relevant and safe news and information systems are vital to enable this way of working, by sharing news and connections and helping to break down traditional silos and vested interests seeking to maintain the status quo and oppose climate action.

3. Consultation paper question

Responding to the consultation question: What are the key areas in which a Health in All Policies approach might assist in addressing the health and wellbeing impacts of climate change and reducing emissions?

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3.1. Croakey Health Media response

A whole-of-government approach is required to enable policies that support development of a news and information ecosystem that is reliable, relevant and safe for communities engaging with climate mitigation and adaptation.

It requires policies to tackle misinformation, disinformation, racism, and polarisation, as well as the market dominance of digital platforms such as Meta and Google. It also requires policies that support social cohesion, equity, digital inclusion, media literacy, health literacy and climate literacy. It means developing media policies that support a more diverse and sustainable news and information ecosystem, including through the development of philanthropy and reforms to support the growth and development of not for profit media organisations.

It also involves concerted efforts to tackle the problem of ‘news deserts’ – communities (whether geographic or other forms) that currently do not have access to reliable, local news and information. Many more communities are under-served in this respect; they may have a local newspaper or a local Facebook group, for example, but these news and information sources are under-resourced and ill-equipped to cope with communities’ needs for reliable news and information during an era of escalating climate disruption.

4. Consultation paper, Enablers

The consultation paper proposes to develop actions around the following enablers to support realisation of the Strategy’s objectives.

1. Workforce, leadership and training
2. Research
3. Communication and engagement
4. Collaboration
5. Monitoring and reporting

4.1. Croakey Health Media comment

Communications is critically important. However, this should be understood as a structural issue, rather than as being about having a ‘communications strategy’. Developing a reliable, relevant and safe news and information system requires structural change and a whole-of-government effort as outlined in previous sections.

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