

From:
Dr Anna Seth MBBS FRACGP DRANZCOG DCH

Tasmania

6th April 2023

To: The Climate Change Office
Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania
Department of State Growth
GPO Box 536 HOBART TAS 7001
climatechange@recfit.tas.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find below my submission on the draft Tasmanian Climate Action Plan 2023-2025. I am a General Practitioner working in Tasmania, a member of Doctors for the Environment Australia (where I co-chair the Mental Health Specific Interest Group), Climate and Health Alliance, and Psychology for a Safe Climate. I note that this submission is a personal one rather than one formally representing these organisations. I provided feedback into earlier stages of the plan via community consultation sessions and as a contributor to a submission from Doctors for the Environment Australia.

I have addressed the consultation questions below:

Vision and goals

1. Do you agree with the proposed vision and goals for the action plan? Which goals are you most supportive of? Are there any other goals that should be considered?

I am entirely supportive of the vision outlined in the draft, however the vision could be expanded to embrace the opportunity to improve the wellbeing of Tasmanians as a result of reducing emissions and building resilience. The health co-benefits of climate action are well documented and create a positive vision for a thriving community.

The goals could also reflect this e.g. By 2030 we will be a community which thrives through harnessing the benefits of climate action and resilience for our health and wellbeing.

Priority areas

2. Will the three priority areas, (1) information and knowledge, (2) transition and innovation and (3) adaptation and resilience, help Tasmania achieve its legislated 2030 emissions reduction target and its vision for action on climate change?

I agree these areas are sensible and broadly encompassing in moving us towards the goals, however I note that all of them have significant health implications and action directions, which could be further expanded upon.

Are there other issues not covered by the three priority areas?

Health and Wellbeing could be embedded more solidly within all of these concepts however also could be a priority in its own right, echoing the federal commitment to a national health and climate strategy and action in other states towards specific health and climate action plans.

Information and knowledge

3. Will the key actions under Priority area 1 help support decision making for you and your community or organisation?

Up-to-date, high quality, accessible information about our future climate is of critical importance to our health sector and I am strongly supportive of this action. Tasmania has some of the worst parameters Australia-wide relating to health and the social determinants of health. Some of the most significant health impacts of climate change will be the mental health related impacts, through direct exposure to heat, extreme weather events and chronic environmental change as well as through general community levels of distress about climate change, which affect young people in particular. A growing body of research defines the current and predicted impacts nationally and internationally. ^{1,2} Tasmanian research gives some indication that these findings are applicable locally as well. For example, our state's ambulance dispatches are increased by as much as 34% during extreme heatwaves ³. I would suggest for this priority to include support for more local research about the predicted impacts of climate change on the health to assist with our adaptation.

Coordinating mapping of climate risks against health demographics, health workforce, and service availability and usage, would greatly enhance the capacity to deliver targeted interventions to the communities who will benefit most, and plan according to predicted future need.

What types of projects should be supported under the final action plan?

1. Support further research into the health impacts of climate change in Tasmania e.g. The long term mental health impacts of extreme weather events of increasing frequency and severity, and strategies to address them. E.g. nature prescribing
2. Cross agency projects to map geographic health and climate data together. Using this data to inform health policies. Examples of policies which would benefit from an understanding of future climate health risk and need related to climate change include the Healthy Tasmania Plan, The Long-term Plan for healthcare | Tasmania 2040, the Rethink 2020 plan (and future iterations), and the Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Strategy.
3. A public health education campaign about climate health risks and the health co-benefits of pro-environmental behaviour. This should be informed by appropriate mental health input and supports. Inspiring positive narratives around the health benefits of transition to a low carbon economy, whilst also accurately informing the public about the risks and steps they can take to adapt.
4. A health sector education campaign to develop better understanding of the intersections between climate change and health, including mental health.
5. Climate Change resources for schools must be developed with the psychological impacts of climate change in mind with appropriate support and training available for teachers and school counsellors.

Transition and innovation

4. Will the key actions under Priority area 2 support Tasmania to achieve its 2030 emissions reduction target and continued emissions reduction across Tasmania?

Yes, I support all these actions with some specific suggestions below. I would suggest including reference in the plan to how we will also support individuals psychologically through the transition to a low emissions economy and support a just transition.

What types of projects should be supported under the final action plan?

The below suggestions are also relevant to priority 1 actions:

1. Public health campaigns about transition and innovation could have positive mental health benefits through inspiring hope and positive visions of the future.
2. Identifying Tasmanian 'Climate Hero's' could be a powerful way to foster hope and trust amongst young Tasmanians who we know are (appropriately) highly concerned about climate change. An existing example of this which could be supported and built upon in the Curious Climate Schools initiative by UTAS.
3. Support and empower emerging young leaders through continued funding of the Tasmanian Youth Climate Leaders Forum

Adaptation and resilience

5. Will the key actions under Priority area 3 build resilience and support adaptation planning across Tasmania?

Yes, I support all these actions with some specific suggestions below.

Resilience needs to be clearly identified as something which is a collective responsibility for communities and governments, and not the sole responsibility of individuals. We must acknowledge that capacity for resilience is largely determined by many aspects outside of individual control, including socio-economic disadvantage, and often compounded by intergenerational disadvantage and trauma, with particular reference to experience of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community. However, I would also recommend that the plan should acknowledge the expertise of Aboriginal Tasmanians in resilience and sustainable practices, and should actively seek their collective expertise on this issue.

What types of projects should be supported under the final action plan?

1. A Health and Climate strategy for Tasmania should be committed to in this action plan. This would bring us into alignment with a national strategies and other state and territory strategies. As a starting point, another climate and health roundtable needs to be convened to capture views from relevant experts and stakeholders.
2. Training on psychological first aid made more broadly available to communities and primary care providers
3. Projects to integrate primary care including general practice with the state disaster response within communities. It must be acknowledged that disasters have a long lasting legacy, the largest of which is their mental health impacts and primary care is often the most accessible source of support for many individuals. GPs are able to provide long term care and know their communities well. A focus on short term external in-reach of services into communities needs to be coordinated with longer term primary care support.⁴
4. A possible avenue here could be to offer [MIMMS](#) training to GPs in high risk areas, or other education packages to help primary care understand the state disaster response model.
5. Expand on current heatwave alerts to include health warnings and advice for heat and air pollution.

Implementation, reporting, and monitoring and evaluation

6. Are there other ways the government could make its action on climate change, and progress towards meeting its targets, more transparent and accessible?

A climate action dashboard would be a useful tool for this and a valuable education resource.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the draft action plan. Please accept my apologies for not fully referencing this document, however I am happy to discuss and provide references on any of the points I have raised.

Yours Sincerely,
Dr Anna Seth
6th April 2023

Selected references:

1. Charlson F, Ali S, Benmarhnia T, Pearl M, Massazza A, Augustinavicius J, et al. Climate Change and Mental Health: A Scoping Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health [Internet]. 2021 Jan [cited 2022 Aug 23];18(9):4486. Available from: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/9/4486>
2. Lawrence E et al. The impact of climate change on mental health and emotional wellbeing: current evidence and implications for policy and practice. Grantham institute Briefing Paper No 36 May 2021 accessed: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/grantham/publications/all-publications/the-impact-of-climate-change-on-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing-current-evidence-and-implications-for-policy-and-practice.php>

3. Campbell SL, Remenyi T, Williamson GJ, Rollins D, White CJ, Johnston FH. Ambulance dispatches and heatwaves in Tasmania, Australia: A case-crossover analysis. *Environmental Research* [Internet]. 2021 Nov [cited 2023 Apr 6];202:111655. Available from: <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S001393512100949X>

4. The Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements report 2020: <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/royal-commission-national-natural-disaster-arrangements-report>