



15 November 2019

To: Mr Stewart Dowrick, CEO MNCLHD
Dr Tim Francis, Board Chair NCPHN
Mr Warren Grimshaw AM, Board Chair MNCLHD
Mr Wayne Jones, CEO NNSWLHD
Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti CSC RFD, Board Chair NNSWLHD

Dear Brian, Wayne, Stewart, Tim and Warren,

Re: Climate Emergency: Action in the Health Sector

This letter is a gesture of and request for mutual support from the NCPHN's Clinical Councils for the ongoing improvement of the effects of health-care-related activity on the biosphere. We know and congratulate both the NCPHN and MNCLHD on having and enacting their existing policies on energy and environmental sustainability. Our request is that this approach be enhanced and amplified to the level we believe warranted across all our decision-making, such that environmental capital impact is considered alongside other essential criteria.

It is now abundantly clear that human activity is having a deleterious effect on the biosphere¹. The consequent effects on the health of individuals and communities are reinforced physically, emotionally and economically. There is, of course, a huge variation in the ability of each of us to have a constructive effect on such activity². Our leverage is affected by education, will, resourcing and collaboration. Health care itself has a significant carbon footprint³.

We are aware that the MNCLHD has an Energy & Environmental Sustainability project within the Capital Works & Asset Management Department. We are also aware that there is a massive solar panel array being installed at Port Macquarie Base Hospital which will apparently supply most or all of the energy requirements for that facility⁴. We know of some

significant waste management strategies being implemented in some hospitals and health care settings⁵.

Whilst in our private lives we are individual consumers making our own choices, many of us, as members of Clinical Councils are part of larger organisations and practices as business owners, managers, or employees with variable levels of authority in decision-making. Some have already implemented initiatives at the level of our own businesses to this effect, such as solar panels and the reduction of printed material.

We would like to be able to make better choices, more easily when it comes to the environmental impacts of our actions and, in the context of health, we wish to both support and be supported by our state and federally funded health organisations, the LHD and PHN, in order to more effectively reduce the deleterious effects of human activity on the environment upon which we depend for our well-being.

While we are not experts in climate mitigation or sustainability, we are experts in our own professions and in the contexts of our work. We know that hospital avoidance reduces carbon emissions, since hospital and ED stays produce lots of carbon, the increased use of telehealth by specialist and GP services will reduce transport emissions.

There are doubtless many other possibilities. We wish to develop and maintain ongoing supervision, mentoring, auditing and resourcing in the realm of sustainable health care, in community and hospitals, such that we can all be as confident as possible that the impact of our health care work on our biosphere is at best positive and at worst, neutral. This is a massive task and we must work together to get the best possible outcomes.

To this end, we are in the process of establishing sustainability sub-committees across our three Clinical Councils and would welcome a representative from each of your organisation to join with us in the endeavour.

We look forward to hearing from you on this critical matter.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jenny Beange Chair, Hasting Macleay Clinical Council
Dr Adrian Gilliland Chair, Mid North Coast Clinical Council
Dr Gull Herzberg Deputy Chair, Mid North Coast Clinical Council
Dr Peter Silberberg Chair, Northern Clinical Council

References

1. Are human activities causing climate change?
2. Climate change and health
3. The carbon footprint of Australian health care
4. Port Macquarie Base Hospital gets 2030 rooftop solar panel

5. Sustainable effort