

The Medical Journal of Australia • MJA

MEDIA RELEASE

CLIMATE INACTION CONTINUES TO HARM AUSTRALIAN HEALTH AND ECONOMY, SAY EXPERTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DESPITE continuing increases in summer maximum temperatures and heatwave intensity, and \$2.2 billion of insured economic losses as a result of the “Black Summer” bushfires, Australia still has no national plan to tackle the health impacts of climate change, according to the authors of the *MJA-Lancet* Countdown special report, published today by *the Medical Journal of Australia*.

Associate Professor Ying Zhang, co-chair of the *MJA-Lancet* Countdown, and colleagues, wrote that substantial increases in both fire risk and population exposure to bushfires were having an impact on Australia’s health and economy.

“As a result of the “Black Summer” bushfires, the monthly airborne particulate matter less than 2.5µm in diameter (PM2.5) concentrations in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory in December 2019 were the highest of any month in any state or territory over the period 2000–2019 at 26.0 µg/m³ and 71.6 µg/m³ respectively, and insured economic losses were \$2.2 billion,” Yang and colleagues wrote.

“We also found growing awareness of and engagement with the links between health and climate change, with a 50% increase in scientific publications and a doubling of newspaper articles on the topic in Australia in 2019 compared with 2018.

“However, despite clear and present need, Australia still lacks a nationwide adaptation plan for health.”

Many other impacts from the Black Summer bushfires “remain uncounted”.

“As Australia recovers from the compounded effects of the bushfires and begins to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the health professions have a pivotal role to play,” wrote Yang and colleagues.

“They are uniquely suited to integrate the response to these short term threats, with the longer term public health implications of climate change, and to advocating that the economic recovery from COVID-19 aligns and strengthens Australia’s commitments under the Paris Agreement.

The *MJA-Lancet* Countdown on health and climate change was established in 2017, and produced its first Australian national assessment in 2018 and its first annual update in 2019. It examines indicators across five broad domains: climate change impacts, exposures and vulnerability; adaptation, planning and resilience for health; mitigation actions and health co-benefits; economics and finance; and public and political engagement.

The 2020 *MJA-Lancet* Countdown special report is available now at:

<https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/213/11/2020-special-report-mja-lancet-countdown-health-and-climate-change-lessons>

It is open access.

All *MJA* media releases are open access and can be found at: <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/media>

All *MJA* COVID-19 articles are open access and can be found at: <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/covid-19>

Please remember to credit *The MJA*.

The *Medical Journal of Australia* is a publication of the Australian Medical Association.

The statements or opinions that are expressed in the MJA reflect the views of the authors and do not represent the official policy of the AMA or the MJA unless that is so stated.

CONTACTS: Vivienne Reiner
Media and Public Relations Advisor
University of Sydney
Email: vivienne.reiner@sydney.edu.au
Ph: 0447 727 024