

# The Medical Journal of Australia • MJA

# MEDIA RELEASE

## **CLIMATE CHANGE DEMANDS SAME LEADERSHIP AS COVID-19**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 10.30am AEDT Monday 21 December 2020**

A LEADING Australian medical clinician and researcher has called on the Federal Government and the health sector to commit to showing the same leadership on climate change as was shown during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

Laureate Professor Nicolas Talley AC, a world-renowned neurogastroenterologist and Editor-in-Chief of the *Medical Journal of Australia* said in an editorial, published today, that Australia's response to COVID-19 had been "strong and effective".

"Key to this success was the valuing by governments of science and data to guide decision making.

"The pandemic forced politicians from across the Australian political divide to prioritise the evidence and expertise of the medical, scientific and public health communities over the voices of conservative commentators, business leaders and politicians," wrote Professor Talley.

"Tough political decisions were made for the sake of the nation's health.

"This bipartisan, science-based approach is a model for the future management of climate change, if implemented alongside an appropriate national plan."

Professor Talley cited research which showed that 2019 was Australia's hottest and driest year on record, with average temperatures 1.52°C above normal and mean rainfall 40% below the 30-year average before 1991. Australia's 2019–20 bushfires burned 10 million hectares, directly killed 33 people and destroyed more than 3000 homes. Smoke engulfed major capital cities, including Sydney and Melbourne, and smoke exposure caused an estimated 417 excess deaths and over 3000 hospital admissions.

"Australia's leading medical and nursing bodies have recognised climate change as a health emergency," wrote Professor Talley.

"Governments of states and territories have committed to zero net carbon emissions by 2050, with climate change adaptation plans incorporating the health sector and investment in renewable energy.

Professor Talley called on the Federal Government to establish a National Health and Climate Change Centre within the Australian Department of Health to develop a National Plan for Health and Climate Change with real-time monitoring.

"Australia has an obligation under the Paris Agreement to submit enhanced nationally determined contributions by the end of 2020," he wrote.

"We recommend that the Australian Government agree to a target of a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, which is what is likely required to limit global warming below 1.5°C."

Additionally, Professor Talley called on the health and medical sector to play its part.

"Australia's health sector should commit itself nationally to zero net carbon emissions by 2040 in line with the National Health Service in the UK, preferably with the states and territories responsible for implementing evidence-based interventions," he said.

“Reducing unnecessary medical tests and procedures will serve to reduce carbon emissions, health care costs and harmful outcomes.

“Research funded by the NHMRC and the Medical Research Futures Fund should guide better ways to efficiently reduce the carbon footprint of Australia’s health care services.”

On 3 December, the *MJA* co-published the *MJA-Lancet* Australian Countdown special report on health and climate change, which showed that “Australia has no decisive national plan to address climate change and its health consequences”.

The *MJA-Lancet* Countdown is available at <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/213/11/2020-special-report-mja-lancet-countdown-health-and-climate-change-lessons> where it is open access.

Professor Talley’s editorial will be open access at available at <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/online-first> from 10.30am AEDT on Monday 21 December 2020

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