

RACMA Position Statement:

A Climate-Ready Health System: The Role of Medical Leadership

Vision

RACMA envisions a climate-resilient, low-carbon healthcare system that protects population health, strengthens system sustainability, and promotes intergenerational wellbeing. Through empowered medical leadership and collaborative governance, we aim to drive change that improves health outcomes, reduces emissions, and enhances health equity across Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the region.

Purpose

This position statement outlines RACMA's commitment to action on climate change as a health and systems issue. It articulates the College's advocacy stance, identifies medical administrators' leadership role, and outlines opportunities to reduce healthcare emissions and strengthen health system resilience.

RACMA recognises that the health system contributes to and responds to climate change. Medical leaders have a critical role in aligning clinical governance, risk management, infrastructure, and workforce development with climate mitigation and adaptation goals. This statement supports leadership by providing a shared position for advocacy, system engagement, and practical action across jurisdictions.

Background

The health impacts of climate change are already evident across the jurisdictions in which RACMA members operate. Rising global temperatures are increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, including bushfires, cyclones, floods, and heatwaves. These events have led to loss of life, displacement of communities, damage to health infrastructure, service disruption, and heightened pressure on emergency response systems. The pathways through which climate change affects health are broad. These include direct physical impacts (such as injury or heat-related illness), environmental degradation (e.g. air pollution, reduced food and water security), and indirect social and economic disruption. Climate change also contributes to rising rates of mental distress and disproportionately affects groups already experiencing structural health disadvantage.

In Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, recent events such as the 2019–2020 Black Summer bushfires and Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023 have underlined the urgency of embedding climate resilience into health system planning. Health services are increasingly called on to manage the acute consequences of climate-related events, while also navigating the long-term demands of adaptation and sustainability.

RACMA also acknowledges the principles of environmental stewardship and intergenerational responsibility. As leaders in healthcare systems, our members have a duty to anticipate risk, plan for sustainability, and lead with foresight, evidence, and integrity.

College Commitments

As the specialist medical college for health system leaders, RACMA recognises that its own operations, programs, and influence must reflect the priorities it advocates. Reducing emissions and building climate resilience are strategic imperatives for health services and leadership responsibilities for institutions such as RACMA.

RACMA will:

- Embed climate change and sustainability into relevant education and training, including the Fellowship and AFRACMA programs, CPD modules, and leadership development activities. This includes exploring opportunities to reflect climate-related leadership competencies in assessment and examination content, and developing future CPD offerings on climate-resilient healthcare.
- Reduce emissions from College operations through improved procurement, reduced travel, hybrid delivery models, and appropriate use of carbon offsets.
- Ensure climate and sustainability considerations are reflected in the College governance structures and risk management frameworks.
- Partner with other medical colleges, jurisdictions, and health system leaders to share good practice, support decarbonisation, and contribute to coordinated national reform
- We will continue to draw on members' expertise to develop pragmatic, system-oriented policy advice that advances health equity and environmental sustainability.
- RACMA will contribute to and initiate research into climate resilience and sustainable healthcare delivery.
- RACMA has an ethical investment framework and is currently revising it to ensure that its portfolio explicitly excludes fossil fuel investments, consistent with the College's commitments on climate and sustainability.

These efforts align with existing requirements set by the Australian Medical Council (AMC), which embed climate change and environmental sustainability in accreditation standards for primary medical education and prevocational training. Climate-related competencies are now expected across undergraduate curricula, PGY1 and PGY2 training, and continuing professional development.

These commitments reflect RACMA's broader role: not only training medical administrators, but modelling the system behaviours that enable safe, accountable, and future-focused care.

System Leadership and Influence

RACMA members hold leadership roles across every health system level — from executive and operational management to clinical governance, risk oversight, and strategic planning. Their decisions shape how services are delivered, teams are led, and systems respond to emerging risks, including climate change.

Medical administrators have a responsibility to lead climate-responsive decision-making. This means ensuring that system design, workforce planning, infrastructure investment, and service delivery all reflect the realities of a changing climate. It also means using established governance tools — credentialing, performance oversight, quality and safety frameworks — to integrate both mitigation and adaptation into everyday health service operations.

System-level leadership includes:

- Supporting health services to assess and respond to climate risk, including through formal climate risk assessments, adaptation planning, and inclusion of climate factors in organisational risk registers
- Ensuring infrastructure, procurement, and models of care align with low-carbon, climate-resilient principles
- Promoting value-based care that improves outcomes while reducing low-benefit interventions and waste
- Leading change management processes that support cultural and operational shifts toward sustainability
- Championing interdisciplinary collaboration and stakeholder engagement to develop system-level responses
- Building and maintaining public trust through evidence-based, non-partisan leadership on climate and health
- Support the use of validated infrastructure and service improvement tools — such as Choosing Wisely, NABERS, and Green Star — to reduce low-value care, improve sustainability, and inform climate-resilient service planning.

RACMA also recognises medical leaders' role in influencing others, including clinical peers, service executives, boards, funders, and policymakers. By using their positions of influence, RACMA members can act as catalysts for coordinated, scalable, and locally informed climate action.

This is not separate from RACMA's existing remit. Leading through uncertainty, balancing competing risks, and stewarding finite system resources are foundational to medical administration. Climate change simply raises the stakes—and the need for deliberate, accountable system leadership.

Call to Action

RACMA supports the multi-college Joint Statement on Climate Change and Health, which commits to advancing sustainable, high-quality care in a changing climate. This includes support for the goals of the National Health and Climate Strategy, including the transition to a net zero healthcare system by 2040. Medical administrators have a critical role in driving this change through governance, leadership, and clinical system redesign.

The health impacts of climate change are no longer hypothetical — they are already shaping service demand, risk profiles, and system performance across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. For those tasked with governing health services, the challenge is not just clinical or operational but strategic.

RACMA encourages health system leaders, institutions, and decision-makers to engage with climate change not as an environmental issue but as a core consideration for healthcare governance, planning, and resilience.

This includes:

- Considering climate risk alongside other strategic and operational risks
- Identifying opportunities to embed sustainability into existing governance, planning, and quality frameworks
- Supporting local teams to build capability in climate-informed decision-making
- Engaging with national and jurisdictional efforts to decarbonise the health system
- Seeking alignment between climate adaptation and broader goals such as workforce wellbeing, financial sustainability, and service equity

Small, deliberate shifts - made early and consistently - can strengthen health systems' resilience and integrity over time. RACMA stands ready to support its members and the broader system in leading that change with credibility, collaboration, and clarity.

Working Together for a Climate-Ready Health System

The effects of climate change are already shaping how health services operate — from workforce and infrastructure pressures to risk management, emergency response, and long-term planning. These impacts are not future challenges; they are present realities.

RACMA encourages health system leaders, institutions, and decision-makers to consider how climate change intersects with their existing responsibilities. Much of the work needed to respond to this challenge can build on the frameworks already in place: governance, clinical safety, resource stewardship, and strategic planning.

We invite our members and colleagues across the health system to take practical, confident steps toward integrating climate considerations into core business, including risk assessment, service design, procurement, infrastructure, and education. Where action feels complex or uncertain, the goal is not perfection but momentum.

RACMA stands ready to support this work through training, policy leadership, and collaboration with those leading at every level of the system. Progress will look different in every context, but it is achievable. Together, we can build health systems that are more resilient, more responsive, and more sustainable — for the challenges we face now, and those still to come.

Key References

[Australian Medical Council \(2023\). Position Statement: The Climate Crisis and Health](#)

[Australian Medical Council \(2023\). Standards for Assessment and Accreditation of Primary Medical Programs](#)

[Australian Medical Council \(2024\). Training and Assessment Requirements for Prevocational PGY1 and PGY2 Training Programs](#)

[Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care \(2023\). National Health and Climate Strategy](#)

[Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(2023\). Sixth Assessment Report – Summary for Policymakers](#)

[World Health Organization \(2023\). Climate Change and Health](#)

[Council of Medical Colleges Aotearoa New Zealand \(2023\). Climate Change Position Statement](#)

[New Zealand Government \(2022\). Health National Adaptation Plan 2022–2026](#)

[Joint Colleges Statement \(2024\). Working Together to Achieve Sustainable, High-Quality Health Care in a Changing Climate](#)

[Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care \(Draft, 2024\). Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Healthcare Module](#)