



Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
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Canberra ACT 2601

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**HCCA Submission: ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Climate Change and a Just Transition**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the above inquiry (“the Inquiry”).

We have focussed our submission on the “equity of programs and rebates to reduce emissions, increase energy efficiency and to help the transition to electrification.”<sup>1</sup>

We understand a “just transition” as one that is fair and equitable. We emphasise that a just transition ensures that vulnerable populations are not unfairly burdened or penalised by these initiatives.

Following, we outline the differential impacts of climate change and the measures taken to address it, on various groups within our communities. We advocate for the concepts of health equity and health in all policies to ensure equity in the transition to electrification.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission and thank you again for the opportunity to provide input.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Lamb".

Jessica Lamb  
Senior Policy Officer  
19 February 2024

**Health Care Consumers' Association**

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## SUBMISSION

### **ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Climate Change and a Just Transition**

April 2025

## About HCCA

The **Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA)** is a health promotion agency and the peak consumer advocacy organisation in the Canberra region. HCCA provides a voice for consumers on local health issues and provides opportunities for health care consumers to participate in all levels of health service planning, policy development and decision making.

HCCA involves consumers through:

- consumer representation and consumer and community consultations;
- training in health rights and navigating the health system;
- community forums and information sessions about health services; and
- research into consumer experience of human services.

HCCA is a Health Promotion Charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission.

## **HCCA Feedback on the ACT Legislative Inquiry into Climate Change and a Just Transition**

Following we draw on the evidence of the:

- 1 threat of climate change to human health;
- 2 differential impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations; and
- 3 need for health equity and health to be considered in all public policies, including programs and rebates in the transition to electrification.

### **1 Threat of climate change to human health**

HCCA's Position Statement on Climate Health and Wellbeing<sup>2</sup> ("HCCA's Statement") notes that:

*Climate change poses the greatest health risk to humans.<sup>3</sup>*

Given the magnitude of the impacts of climate change, the environmental sustainability of health care is one of HCCA's five priority areas within our Strategic Plan 2021-2024<sup>4</sup>.

HCCA has endorsed the Climate Action Health Alliance Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia<sup>5</sup> ("the Framework"). The Framework's priorities of "Health promoting and emissions reducing policies" and "A sustainable and climate-resilient health sector" are relevant to any outcomes from the current inquiry.

### **2 Differential impacts of climate on vulnerable populations**

HCCA's Statement outlines the differential impacts of climate change on groups within our communities:

*Climate change...has profound risks and impacts on health, particularly for vulnerable populations such as older people, people with chronic conditions, those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, people with a disability, women, girls, and people who are from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background.*

*Climate change impacts social determinants of health, including housing, food, and water. It has resulted in observed increase and intensity and frequency of extreme weather events<sup>4</sup> as well as food and water insecurity. These effects have significant impacts on physical and mental health, including increased risks of infectious diseases and exposure to pollutants, particularly through extreme weather events.*

HCCA advocates on the following four key climate change issues all of which are relevant to the Inquiry:

- 1 Environmental sustainability;
- 2 Health care during emergencies;
- 3 Access to health care; and
- 4 Consumer participation.

We note that the ACT Government has enacted the ACT Human Rights (Healthy Environment) Act Amendment 2023. The Healthy Environment Amendment provides express statutory recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. This right must be maintained in a just transition to electrification.

Incorporating this right to a healthy environment will ensure that environmental and climate impacts are given proper consideration in the exercise of all public authority functions. Enshrining this right is consistent with a growing international consensus around the importance of environmental protections and healthy environments as a human right.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the differential impacts on vulnerable populations requires an understanding of the diverse nature of consumers within our communities. This diversity needs to be considered in a just transition. Our Inclusive Health Care Position Statement<sup>7</sup> recognises the diversity of consumers, their experiences, identities, social experiences, needs, wants and bodies. This diversity needs to be understood and accounted for in any public programs and rebates implemented as part of the move to electrification.

### **3 Need for health equity and health in all public policies, programs and rebates to ensure a just transition to electrification**

Given the threat to human health noted above, we urge the consideration of health and its associated concepts detailed below in all existing and proposed programs and rebates in the transition to electrification.

We take it as understood that any future public policies or rebates must be consistent with existing ACT Government health policies, strategies and frameworks such as Accessible, Accountable and Sustainable: A Framework for the ACT Public Health System 2020-2030<sup>8</sup> (the Framework). The concepts endorsed in the Framework are a useful lens through which to view any public programs – including those progressing the energy transition.

We start by building a picture of the definition of, and contributors towards, health and wellbeing.

#### **Health**

The World Health Organisation Constitution defines health as:

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>9</sup>

The Ottawa Charter on Health Promotion states that:

“To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is, therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities.”<sup>10</sup>

The proposed Bill could expand the definition of health to include the following to ensure that all facets of health are covered, including the enablers of health and reduction of

health inequities. We think it is important for decision-makers to see these definitions in the Bill to understand the multi-faceted nature of “health and wellbeing”. It is important that decision makers who are not experts in the health sector understand the breadth of relevant considerations.

### **Pre-requisites for health**

The Ottawa Charter’s list of **prerequisites for health**:

“The fundamental conditions and resources for health are:

- peace,
- shelter,
- education,
- food,
- income,
- a stable eco-system,
- sustainable resources,
- social justice, and equity.

Improvement in health requires a secure foundation in these basic prerequisites.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Social determinants of health**

The social determinants of health:

“are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems.”<sup>11</sup>

These social determinants of health need to be understood and recognised in order to achieve a just transition to electrification.

### **Health equity in “Health For All”**

“Health equity is defined as the absence of unfair and avoidable or remediable differences in health among population groups defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically”<sup>12</sup>

We know that climate change has disproportionate effects on marginalised communities. It poses profound risks to and impacts on health, particularly for vulnerable populations such as older people, people with chronic conditions, those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, people with a disability, women, girls, and people who are from a culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Climate change, as well as the measures taken to address it, impacts on the social determinants of health, including housing, food, and water.

We would like to see the inclusion of an equity focus in the development of legislation and public programs to acknowledge that structural and environmental changes can have differing social, economic, public health, and other adverse impacts on vulnerable populations and their capacity for resilience and to engage in reduction and mitigation strategies is more limited.<sup>13</sup>

The WHO goal of “Health For All”<sup>14</sup> also recognises the need for health equity in the implementation of (health) policies and strategies. This goal also recognises the importance of a gender perspective being applied to public policies.

### **Building healthy public policy**

Building Healthy Public Policy is an Ottawa Charter action that:

“puts health on the agenda of policy makers in all sectors and at all levels, directing them to be aware of the health consequences of their decisions and to accept their responsibilities for health.”<sup>15</sup>

This call for health to be considered “in all sectors and at all levels” is paramount in the decarbonisation of public policies and programs. It is also paramount that “health” is understood in its broadest terms, including the concepts outlined above.

Amongst the thirteen recommendations of the Final Report of The WHO Council on the Economics of Health For All<sup>16</sup> we note the following as particularly relevant in the context of a just transition to electrification in the ACT:

#### **Recommendation 1: valuing the essential**

Treat health and wellbeing, health workers and health systems as a long-term investment, not a short-term cost

#### **Recommendation 2: health as a human right**

Use legal and financial commitments to enforce health as a human right

#### **Recommendation 3: planetary health**

Restore and protect the environment by upholding international commitments to a regenerative economy which links planet and people.

#### **Recommendation 8: collective intelligence**

Build symbiotic public-private alliances to maximise public value, sharing both risks and rewards.

#### **Recommendation 11: whole-of-government**

Recognise that Health For All is not just for health ministries but for all agencies.

#### **Recommendation 12: state capacity**

Invest in the dynamic capabilities of the public sector, institutionalizing experimentation and learning, to lead effectively in Health For All.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/2356511/ToR-ECCB-Inquiry-into-Climate-change-and-just-transition.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2356511/ToR-ECCB-Inquiry-into-Climate-change-and-just-transition.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hcca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Final-Climate-Health-and-Wellbeing-Position-Statement-March-2023.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hcca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Final-Climate-Health-and-Wellbeing-Position-Statement-March-2023.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hcca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/FINAL-HCCA-Strategic-Plan-2021-2024-Web-version-compressed.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>

[https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/caha/pages/40/attachments/original/1498008324/CAHA\\_Framework\\_for\\_a\\_National\\_Strategy\\_on\\_Climate\\_Health\\_and\\_Well-being\\_v05\\_SCREEN\\_%28Full\\_Report%29.pdf?1498008324](https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/caha/pages/40/attachments/original/1498008324/CAHA_Framework_for_a_National_Strategy_on_Climate_Health_and_Well-being_v05_SCREEN_%28Full_Report%29.pdf?1498008324)

<sup>6</sup> [UN General Assembly declares access to clean and healthy environment a universal human right | UN News](#)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hcca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/HCCA-Position-Statement-Inclusive-Health-Care-PDF.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-](https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/Strategic%20Framework_Feb%202020_FINAL%20MIN%20ENDORSED.pdf)

[07/Strategic%20Framework\\_Feb%202020\\_FINAL%20MIN%20ENDORSED.pdf](https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/Strategic%20Framework_Feb%202020_FINAL%20MIN%20ENDORSED.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Constitution, World Health Organisation <https://www.who.int/about/accountability/governance/constitution>

<sup>10</sup> The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986) <https://www.who.int/teams/health-promotion/enhanced-wellbeing/first-global-conference>.

<sup>11</sup> Social determinants of health (WHO) [https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1)

<sup>12</sup> Health equity in social determinants of health (WHO) [https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab\\_3](https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_3)

<sup>13</sup> IPCC Sixth Assessment Report: impact, adaptation and vulnerability (2022). Chapter 8: Poverty, livelihoods and sustainable development. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-8/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/em\\_rc44\\_10\\_annex\\_en.pdf](https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/em_rc44_10_annex_en.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Health promotion action means <https://www.who.int/teams/health-promotion/enhanced-wellbeing/first-global-conference/actions>

<sup>16</sup> [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/council-on-the-economics-of-health-for-all/council-eh4a\\_finalreport\\_execsummary-6pager-web-ii.pdf?sfvrsn=6900de9\\_3&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/council-on-the-economics-of-health-for-all/council-eh4a_finalreport_execsummary-6pager-web-ii.pdf?sfvrsn=6900de9_3&download=true)