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## From the President

16 June 2023

The Hon Natasha Fyles MLA  
Chief Minister of the Northern Territory  
Parliament House  
GPO Box 3146  
DARWIN NT 0801

Via Email: [Chief.Minister@nt.gov.au](mailto:Chief.Minister@nt.gov.au)

Dear Chief Minister Fyles

### **The RACP recognises the health harms of fossil fuels and calls for an urgent transition to clean renewable energy in the Northern Territory**

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) trains, educates, and advocates on behalf of over 21,000 physicians and 9,000 trainee physicians, across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, including 164 physicians and 85 trainees in the Northern Territory.

The RACP represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, infectious diseases medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine, rheumatology, and addiction medicine. The RACP is a member-led organisation committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients and the community.

I understand that recently, a group of paediatricians wrote to you raising health concerns about unconventional gas extraction in the Beetaloo Sub-basin.

Climate change and health is one of the RACP's priority policy areas with authorship of several position statements - [Climate Change and Health](#), [Environmentally Sustainable Healthcare](#) and the [Health Benefits of Mitigating Climate Change](#). More recently the RACP commissioned a report - [Climate Change and Australia's Healthcare Systems – A Review of Literature, Policy and Practice](#), which has been endorsed by nine (9) other medical colleges.

Climate change poses a significant health threat through impacts related to increasingly more frequent and intense extreme weather events, increasing temperatures, changes to vector-borne disease patterns, and worsening food and water shortages. Health consequences include heat stress; respiratory, gastrointestinal, and cardiovascular illness; injury; malnutrition, and psychological distress<sup>1</sup>. Australia is facing greater climate impacts

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<sup>1</sup> [climate-change-and-health-position-statement.pdf \(racp.edu.au\)](#)

than many other parts of the world<sup>2</sup> and the Northern Territory faces increasingly hot temperatures and the complex challenges of supporting communities in rural and remote areas through extreme weather. Further “*climate change is compounding historical injustices and disrupts cultural and spiritual connections to Country that are central to health and wellbeing*”<sup>3</sup> for First Nations people.

As a paediatrician, I am conscious of the importance of early childhood growth and development and the adverse and long-lasting impacts that extreme weather events, air pollution, and food insecurity can have on the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

The RACP recognises that fossil fuel combustion and extraction contribute significantly to climate change and cause other environmental impacts, including air pollution and water contamination. The RACP has called on all Australian governments to “*require all fossil fuel extraction projects within their jurisdiction to undertake a full independent Health Impact Assessment before proceeding, including the effects on climate change*”<sup>4</sup>.

Another of our key asks is an urgent transition to renewable energy across all economic sectors with support to affected communities<sup>1</sup>. This provides the opportunity to reduce future health impacts of climate change, as well as create health benefits through reduced air pollution and reduced occupational and environmental health hazards for workers involved in fossil fuel extraction.

The RACP has welcomed the development of a National Health and Climate Strategy and I have been pleased to be part of the Chief Medical Officer Advisory Group informing this process. We have also been working with our members and with other medical colleges through our Climate Change and Health Multi-College Advisory Committee. The RACP has also been advocating for the Federal Government to develop a strategy that engages and works with state, territory, and local governments.

Our [Health in All Policies](#) (HiAP) has been a key aspect of the draft National Strategy documents and discussions. HiAP seeks to address the social determinants of health and places health as a key decision-making factor in all areas of policy by:

- Systematically considering the health and health-system implications of policy decisions,
- Seeking synergies between policy portfolios, and
- Avoiding harmful health impacts to improve population health and health equity.

In the past we have been very pleased to receive correspondence from you acknowledging appreciation for the RACP’s advice on climate change and health, especially in relation to our [2020 NT Election Statement](#). I would welcome the opportunity to discuss climate change and health with you.

Please contact Katherine Economides, Senior Executive Officer SA/NT, via email at [RACPNT@racp.edu.au](mailto:RACPNT@racp.edu.au) to arrange a meeting or if you require further information about the matters noted in this letter.

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<sup>2</sup> [climate-change-and-australias-healthcare-systems-a-review-of-literature-policy-and-practice.pdf \(racp.edu.au\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Lowitja\\_ClimateChangeHealth\\_1021\\_D10.pdf](#)

<sup>4</sup> [health-benefits-of-mitigating-climate-change-position-statement.pdf \(racp.edu.au\)](#)

Yours sincerely

Dr Jacqueline Small  
President, RACP

Professor Ngiare Brown  
Chair, Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Health Committee

Dr Felicity Hodder  
Deputy Chair, Northern  
Territory Regional  
Committee