



## Tackling climate change is a global medical community responsibility



Climate change is no longer a distant threat, but a pressing reality that is significantly affecting human health.<sup>1</sup> With 2023 marked as the hottest year on record,<sup>2</sup> the projections are dire: the direct health impacts of climate change are projected to take 250,000 lives annually by 2050.<sup>3</sup>

From extreme heat to flash flooding, climate change will affect everything from water security and food production<sup>4</sup> to patterns of infectious disease. No nation is immune, but the impact will be felt more by some than others.

In this escalating global health emergency, the medical community's collaborative action is vital. As physicians, it is our duty to create change within our health systems and advocate for our patients' health.

Despite being separated by thousands of miles geographically and two hemispheres, the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) and the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) are closely united in tackling this issue. Their work should serve as a clarion call for health leaders worldwide.

Physicians in Australasia have long advocated for climate health action. The RACP's extensive climate work<sup>5</sup> garners strong support and reflects its members' increasing concern about climate health impacts and the use and extraction of fossil fuels.

The RACP has sought to bring health leaders together, establishing the Healthy Climate Future campaign,<sup>6</sup> which unites 13 medical colleges and numerous specialty societies.

As a result of such work, increasing recognition of the health challenges from extreme weather and consistent health sector campaigning led to Australia's first National Health and Climate Strategy,<sup>7</sup> with the Australian government recognising the RACP's influence in securing the strategy.

In the UK, the RCP has demonstrated leadership by adopting sustainability and climate change as one of its four campaign priorities since 2023. The establishment of an advisory group and the appointment of special advisers on sustainability have been pivotal steps towards embedding environmental sustainability in healthcare.

The RCP's recent report on healthcare sustainability and climate change<sup>8</sup> set out what the UK government must do to reduce the health impacts of climate change and how the NHS can effectively prioritise environmental sustainability. This includes redirecting funding and subsidies, and ensuring capital investment to reduce the environmental impact of healthcare delivery.

The RCPSC has moved to embed planetary health into its strategy, enabling other medical organisations to champion the cause. Planetary health and sustainable healthcare is one of the three main themes in its strategic plan for 2023–26.<sup>9</sup> It has created the organisational architecture to deliver this strategy, with a new Planetary Health and Sustainable Healthcare national advisory group and a planetary health clinician educator position, both of which will inform and advise RCPSC senior management and governing Council on responsible change.

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The RCPSC, in collaboration with the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Collège des médecins du Québec and the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, is integrating planetary health in their revision process for the CanMEDS framework, which defines the competencies that a physician needs to effectively meet the needs of patients.

Our governments and health service have a vital role to play, but it is the concerted efforts of all medical organisations and health professionals that will drive meaningful change.

We must continue to build our understanding of the health impacts of climate change, and for others to be inspired by the action already taken to educate and advocate for our patients and the next generation of physicians.

As three medical colleges from across the globe, we are united in our efforts to mitigate the health impact of climate change – and now call on others to do the same.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Husein Moloo:** Conceptualization, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. **Arnagretta Hunter:** Conceptualization, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. **Ramesh P Arasaradnam:** Conceptualization, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Project administration.

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Husein Moloo  
*Planetary Health, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada,  
Ottawa, Canada*

Arnagretta Hunter  
*Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Canberra, Australia*

Ramesh P Arasaradnam\*  
*Royal College of Physicians London, London, UK*

\*Corresponding author.  
*E-mail address: [r.asaradnam@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:r.asaradnam@warwick.ac.uk) (R.P. Arasaradnam)*