

*From the President's Office*  
*Dr. Danielle McMullen*  
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24 June 2020

**Portfolio Committee No.2 – Health**

Parliament House  
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Sydney NSW 2000

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**Inquiry into Health Impacts of Exposure to Poor Levels of Air Quality Resulting from Bushfires and Drought**

**Re: Questions on notice**

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I have another question for the AMA. I wanted you to expand on—I think this is a particularly good example that you refer to in your submission in relation to the Hazelwood health study, which was the study that investigated the health outcomes of populations that were exposed to six weeks of smoke from the 2014 Hazelwood coal mines in Victoria. Are you able to expand on what was found in that research?

Dr McMULLEN: I do not have further information in front of me other than what was in the submission, but I can take that on notice and get a broader summary provided back to this group if that is helpful. Otherwise, one of my other colleagues on the panel may have other information about the study itself.

**Summary of the Hazelwood Health Study**

The Hazelwood Health Study was commissioned by the Victorian Government following community concerns about the long-term health impacts of the fire in the Morwell open cut mine adjacent to the Hazelwood power station which covered the area in smoke and ash for six weeks in February and March 2014.

The study is led by independent researchers from Monash University in collaboration with Federation University of Tasmania, University of Adelaide, and the CSIRO. Monash

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University leads the consortium of research organisations undertaking the Hazelwood Health Study over the next 20 years. The study is being funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services.

The aim of the study is to identify potential health outcomes for people living in Morwell and the broader Latrobe Valley who may have been impacted by the smoke from the mine fire. “These might include heart and lung disease, cancer or mental health problems. It will also look at the effects on vulnerable groups such as infants and children, young people, and older people.”<sup>i</sup>

The Hazelwood Health Study is intended to provide evidence which informs health service planning in the region.

Rather than wait until the end of the study (20 years after its initiation) to release its final report to the community, the study team has been releasing findings as early as possible after they become available. Reports and findings are available on the Hazelwood Health Study website – [hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au](http://hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au).

To date, facts sheets and summaries have been released on these research areas: Psychological Impacts, Community Wellbeing, Latrobe ELF Study, Cardiovascular, Respiratory, Adult Survey, Hazelinks, Older People, Air Quality Assessment.

The Hazelwood Health Study Team have published five Annual Reports to date, with the last one published 15 November 2019. Additionally, more than 16 reports have also been published.

While the study is ongoing, the findings to date are numerous. Research released in December 2019 found smoke from the mine fire negatively impacted children’s health.

It found children in Morwell and the Latrobe region who were exposed to the mine fire smoke in the womb were reported by their parents to have more runny noses, coughs, and episodes of wheezing.

As a result, visits to doctors increased and children were more likely to be diagnosed with respiratory infections 2-4 years after the fire.

Researchers also found that children who were exposed to the mine fire smoke between birth and two years of age had more antibiotics dispensed by a pharmacist in the first year after the fire.

They were also reported by their parents to have more runny noses and coughs and greater use of asthma puffers 2-4 years after the fire.<sup>ii</sup>

As the study is ongoing, the findings are still preliminary.

The Victorian Government received the CSIRO air quality modelling report on 13 February 2016. This report assesses the potential impact of exposure to smoke during the mine fire. The CSIRO report, combined with the Hazelwood Long Term Health Study,

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includes analysis of potential health effects of carbon monoxide, other criterion pollutants and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons.

*The Hazelwood Mine fire inquiry report 2015-16: volume III – health improvement* included a recommendation that the state government review the scope of the Hazelwood Long Term Health Study. The department engaged Deloitte Access Economics to undertake this review, which was delivered in July 2016. The government response to the Deloitte report was delivered 16 Oct.

The Hazelwood Long Term Health Study Ministerial Advisory Committee commenced meeting in July 2017, and provide independent oversight, transparency and better engagement with the community in relation to the study.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr. Danielle McMullen**  
**President, AMA (NSW)**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/hazelwood/health-study>

<sup>ii</sup> [hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au](http://hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au).