

Submission
No 47

**INQUIRY INTO EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND
APPROPRIATE DELIVERY OF OUTPATIENT AND
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

Organisation: Doctors for the Environment Australia

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Doctors for the Environment Australia submission to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry - Equity, accessibility and appropriate delivery of outpatient and community mental health care in New South Wales

Young people are at the forefront calling for action on climate change. They are also especially affected by the mental health impacts of climate change and environmental degradation (1-3). Climate change is the major threat to health this century (4, 5). Climate change is increasingly impacting young people's mental health via multiple, interacting pathways both globally and in Australia (1, 2, 6-9).

Even youth who are not personally distressed by the reality of climate change, are subject to serious mental health harms due to climate change (3, 6, 10).

Climate change increases youth anxiety and depressive disorders and emergency department presentations with suicidality, eating disorders and psychosis (6, 12). Rises in hot weather with climate change, in turn increase youth mental health emergency presentations with suicidality (13). Young people experiencing mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or substance use disorders increasingly need hospitalisation during extreme heat (13). Youth impacted by climate change driven rises in frequency and severity of bushfires and floods, have higher rates of anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression (6).

What can be done. Young people in Australia are witnessing climate driven increases in hot weather and disasters and are often highly aware of widespread misinformation including "greenwashing" (14). Evidence shows that most young people in Australia are distressed by insufficient action by Governments (8, 14). Insufficient action on climate change by those in authority also worsens mental health outcomes after disasters as the trauma is caused or worsened by other people (3).

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organisation formed in 2001, consisting of thousands of volunteer medical doctors and medical students across Australia, many of the latter being young people themselves (11). DEA volunteer medical doctors and students are supported by a small, but dedicated, group of DEA staff. DEA translates robust, scientific research into accessible information, education, and advocacy on health and climate change and the environment – notably on the crucial, growing medical evidence base on youth mental health and climate change (3).

DEA contributes to resources including evidence based, peer-reviewed reports in plain language for the general public (2), health professional education with universities and medical colleges (15,16, 17), and contributions to reports and policy through engagement and submissions to Government (6,11,14). DEA works alongside people from priority populations including young people, First Nations' people and people with lived experience (7). DEA provides media releases and articles correcting misinformation which can otherwise harm youth mental health (18).

Leadership on climate change action and genuine engagement with young people by those

in authority, including MPs and Senators, are key to preventing substantial harm to youth mental health (6, 14, 18). DEA provides trusted, medical evidence based and accessible resources on climate change and youth mental health. We also provide a platform for medical students, who are often young people, to upskill, connect and take action, at a time when leadership and improved climate and youth mental health policy are crucial (6,14,18).
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