



## Workshop on NHMRC's role in addressing health implications of environmental change

*Resilience to environmental change, emerging health threats and emergencies* is one of NHMRC's strategic priorities identified for action for 2018-2022. NHMRC has previously funded research in these areas, but has identified the need to boost research capacity and capability with a targeted investment. By focusing on this priority, NHMRC aims to improve Australia's preparedness and responsiveness to human health threats from changing environmental conditions and extreme weather events.

On 1 November 2019, at a workshop with researchers and experts, NHMRC CEO Professor Anne Kelso AO announced \$10 million over 5 years for a special initiative in health and environmental change research. The workshop was the first step in scoping the parameters of this special initiative.

The workshop focused on the following questions:

1. What critical health issues are not being adequately researched and limit Australia's ability to develop resilience to environmental change, i.e. is there a gap to address?
2. Are there challenges or barriers for future health and medical research in Australia to tackling these issues? Are they related to capacity or capability?
3. What options could NHMRC consider to stimulate and support health and medical research on human health and environmental change through its new grant program?

The workshop discussed a broad range of issues that affect Australia's ability to measure the impacts of environmental change at the individual and population health level. In particular, there are limited data on the long-term health effects of changing environmental conditions and exposure to extreme weather events, as well as a potential need for more real-time health data to support disaster management and emergency responsiveness. Participants also agreed that there is limited understanding of what strategies are effective in mitigating the complex interaction of changing climate conditions with health inequity, inequality and vulnerabilities. Research on these issues will help build a resilient and responsive health system.

Some of the challenges for researchers were identified as: data sharing and integration of climate change modelling with health data; structural barriers related to research funding and translation; and effective communication between researchers across fields and with policy makers. The workshop concluded that building a multidisciplinary, collaborative research network is needed to understand the complex interaction between primary, secondary and tertiary health effects of environmental and climate change. Such a network should be able to systematically assess health risks, develop and assess mitigation and adaptation plans, and estimate the cost-benefit of strategies that address the impact of environmental change on human health.

NHMRC will consult further with relevant experts and stakeholders to refine the parameters of the special initiative before opening the call for applications in time for funding to commence in 2021. In the meantime, NHMRC continues to welcome applications for research on all aspects of human health, including the impact of environmental change and extreme weather events, through its grant program.