

Level 11, 257 Collins Street Melbourne VIC 3000 PO Box 38 Flinders Lane VIC 8009 T: (03) 8662 3300

22 November 2023

Committee Secretary Environment and Communications Legislation Committee Department of the Senate PO Box 6100 Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted via email to: seniorclerk.committees.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Members of the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee

Submission to the Inquiry into the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is pleased to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the *Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023* (the Bill).

We understand that the proposed Bill seeks to amend the *Climate Change Act 2022* to include two statutory duties to decisions made under the following Acts: *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999; Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Act 1991; Infrastructure Australia Act 2008; National Reconstruction Fund Corporation Act 2023; Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Act 2016; & Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act2006.* These proposed duties aim to ensure decision makers:

- Prioritise, as a primary consideration, the health and wellbeing of current and future Australian children (up to 18 years) when assessing the likely (direct or indirect) impact of greenhouse gas emissions, and
- Cannot approve coal, oil, or gas projects if the emissions would harm the health of current and future Australian children.

We note there are no terms of reference for this proposed Bill inquiry and that the committee is seeking comments on the Bill itself.

The impacts of climate change on the health and wellbeing of all Australians and the global community, and the inequality of these impacts, are of particular interest to the APS and our members, as detailed in our <u>APS Position</u> <u>Statement: Psychology and Climate Change¹</u> and in recent submissions such as the <u>APS Submission to the National</u> <u>Health and Climate Strategy Consultation²</u> and the <u>APS Pre-Budget Submission 2023-2024³</u>.

As per the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) AR6 Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report⁴, we are at a critical juncture where immediate action has the potential to prevent catastrophic impacts which will be felt by current and future generations for potentially thousands of years into the future. Psychologists, including psychology practitioners, academics and researchers, are highly motivated to leverage their expertise in human behaviour and evidence-based psychological knowledge, skills and resources towards the mitigation of, and adaptation to, the effects of climate change.

Thus, the APS offers our overall support to this Bill. In our submission, we summarise our position on psychology and climate change and the arguments and evidence relevant to the proposed Bill. We also put forward some considerations concerning the proposed Bill and other related matters.



If any further information is required from the APS, I would be happy to be contacted through the national office on (03) 8662 3300 or by email at <u>z.burgess@psychology.org.au</u>

Yours sincerely

Dr Zena Burgess, FAPS FAICD Chief Executive Officer



APS Submission to the Inquiry into the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023

About the APS

The APS is the leading professional association for psychologists in Australia. We are dedicated to advancing the scientific discipline and ethical practice of psychology and works to realise the full human potential of individuals, organisations and their communities through the application of psychological science and knowledge.

Our work is informed by a human rights approach and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which champion wellbeing, inclusivity and the empowerment of all people⁵. Of particular relevance to the proposed Bill is SDG 13 which aims to "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts". The proposed Bill also critically relates to SDG 3 which aims to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".

By advocating on behalf of our members and the community for sustainable development, we strive to bring about meaningful reform in Australian health, wellbeing and social policies and systems. Our overarching objective is to ensure equitable access for all to quality, evidence-based services that promote health and well-being through proactive measures, prevention, early intervention and treatment.

As proponents of evidence-based practice, the APS draws on data and research about the characteristics, impacts and best practices related to the mitigation of and adaption to climate change. We also draw upon the experience and expertise of our APS members.

The APS Position and Recommendations for Psychology and Climate Change

The APS has detailed our position on climate change in our evidence-informed <u>APD Position Statement: Psychology</u> and <u>Climate Change</u>¹ and in other documents such as the <u>APS Submission to the National Health and Climate Strategy</u> <u>Consultation</u>² and the <u>APS Pre-Budget Submission 2023-2024</u>³. In summary, the APS position on climate change is as follows.

- The APS accepts the consensus of authoritative Australian and international scientists that human activities, particularly since the mid-20th century, have resulted in a steep growth in greenhouse gas concentrations, causing substantial global warming and generating a high risk of catastrophic climate change (e.g., 4,6).
- The APS acknowledges the increasingly significant and disastrous consequences of climate change, such as the growing frequency and intensity of natural disasters such as bushfires and flooding that Australians and citizens around the globe have experienced in recent years⁷.
- The APS identifies climate change as the foremost threat to 21st-century health and wellbeing, affecting Australians, future generations and humanity at large but having unequal impact across geography, generations and socioeconomic strata^{8,9}.
- The APS calls attention to the well-established impacts of climate change on mental health and wellbeing^{10,11}. Both the direct effects and threat of climate change can arouse deep feelings, ranging from fear through to anger and despair, which can in turn negatively impact aspects of health, wellbeing and an individual's capacity to function and contribute to the broader community¹².
- The APS stands strong with Australian and international scientists who continue to call urgently for more significant responses to climate change mitigation and adaption at the national, organisational and community levels.

Considering the ongoing urgency of the climate crisis and the importance of understanding and addressing its psychological, health and social dimensions, the APS has made numerous recommendations including that Governments, industries, organisations and the public must:

- Recognise the urgency of the climate crisis,
- Develop effective strategies to mitigate climate change and minimise climate change impacts, and promote successful community adaptation and resilience, and
- Pay particular attention to equity and justice for marginalised and vulnerable groups in developing strategies.



The APS has highlighted as part of our advocacy efforts that psychology professionals have the knowledge, skills, resources and willingness to:

- Assist governments, communities and individuals to prepare for and reduce the risks of climate-related events such as floods and bushfires (environmental adaptation), and help individuals and communities adapt to their psychosocial impacts (psychological adaptation),
- Address barriers to behavioural change for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and motivate and support the needed changes, and
- Deliver effective, evidence-based psychological first aid immediately after climate-related disasters, including via first responder programs such as our <u>APS Disaster Response Network</u>, and support to individuals and communities over the longer term.

The Impacts of Climate Change on the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

As highlighted above, the APS has continued to draw attention to the ample evidence, internationally and nationally, that demonstrates that climate change and associated natural disasters are impacting the health and wellbeing of the vulnerable and marginalised in our society, including our children and young people ^(e.g., 13–19).

Research shows that children and young Australians are deeply concerned, and at times overwhelmed, by uncertainty associated with the climate crisis. For example, the most recent annual Mission Australia Youth Survey in 2022, a nation-wide survey of 19,000 young people aged between 15 and 19, identified the distressing impact of climate change on our youth with 51% identifying the environment as one of the most important issues in Australia (up from 38% in 2021 and 29.8% in 2020), and 25.5% extremely or very concerned about climate change¹³. A subsequent report prepared by Orygen^{14,15} revealed that heightened climate concern among youth was associated with poor mental health and wellbeing as indicated by low subjective wellbeing (50% of respondents with heighted climate change concern), psychological distress (38%), a self-reported mental health condition (26%), poor coping 62%) and a pessimistic outlook (23%). The Orygen report identified that the connections between climate change and poor mental wellbeing were independent of other mental health risk factors and that these associations were more pronounced among vulnerable young people who identify as gender diverse, Indigenous or residing in regional/remote areas.

The World Health Organisation has this month released an urgent call to action that highlights how climate hazards also heighten risks to mothers and babies during pregnancy²⁰. This includes physical health implications of climate change, such as gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, premature delivery, low birth weights and stillbirths, but also lasting mental health impacts like stress, anxiety and depression, which are known risks for adverse perinatal outcomes and intergenerational trauma^{21–23}.

The findings about the impacts of climate change on the health and wellbeing of children and young people must be considered within the context of currently unacceptably high levels of psychological distress and mental ill health for Australia's children and youth and in the perinatal period, noting that:

- Each year, an estimated 1 in 5 Australian children starts school showing signs of psychosocial stress²⁴, and 1 in 7 school-aged children experience one or more mental health, behavioural or neurodevelopmental disorders^{24,25}. There are also those children, often referred to as the 'missing middle', who experience psychosocial distress but fall outside of diagnostic thresholds and mental health reporting^{26,27}.
- Almost 40 per cent (39.6% or 1.2 million) of Australian young people aged 16-24 years have experienced a mental disorder in the last 12 months, impacting almost half of young females (45.5 per cent) and one third of young males (32.4 per cent), with anxiety disorders being the most common ²⁸.
- Studies in Australia and around the world find that up to 1 in 10 women experience depression during pregnancy and 1 in 7 in the year following birth. Around 1 in 5 women in the antenatal and postnatal periods experience anxiety disorders with high comorbidity with depression²⁹.



- There are considerable flow-on effects into adulthood of poor mental health and wellbeing during the perinatal period and in childhood. Approximately 50 per cent of adult mental illness begins to present in young people by the time they turn 14 years old ^{30,31}. People with mental illness live an average 10 years less than those who do not, with 80 per cent of this due to physical comorbidities and not suicide³².
- The costs of not preventing and addressing the mental health and wellbeing of our young people is considerable. In 2020 the Productivity Commission found mental illness and suicide was costing the Australian economy \$220bn per year on pre-pandemic figures³³. The situation is now worse.

It is clear, that without urgent and appropriate Government leadership and action on climate change as per the proposed Bill, and on mental health and wellbeing more broadly, we risk a lost generation of young people unable to live up to their potential, with devasting effects for our economy and society.

APS Response to the Proposed Bill

The APS notes that the proposed Bill aligns with APS advocacy and calls for urgent:

- Government recognition of the strong, multi-faceted interactions between the effects of climate change and health and wellbeing, especially for at-risk and vulnerable groups such as children and youth, and
- Government action and accountability, particularly for averting harm to the mental health and wellbeing of current and future Australian children.

Thus, the APS offers our overall support to the proposed Bill as a legislative mechanism that requires that the interests of children and young people are considered and safeguarded in climate change decision making.

While we offer our support for the proposed Bill, we encourage the Committee to consider the following feedback about the Bill and related matters:

- The APS applauds the inclusion of emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing in the proposed Bill's reference to health and wellbeing. However, we recommend incorporating definitions for these terms within the Bill to provide clear guidance to decision-makers who will be subject to the Bill. Additionally, we propose a more comprehensive conceptualisation of mental health and wellbeing, encompassing not only emotional but also social (and emotional) wellbeing. This refinement would enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the Bill in acknowledging the diverse aspects of health and wellbeing that are impacted by climate change. Social and emotional wellbeing as a concept is also more aligned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander conceptualisations of mental health and wellbeing³⁴.
- While prioritising climate change legislation that specifically safeguards the interests of current and future children is crucial, it is equally important to enact comprehensive legislation that protects the health and wellbeing of all in vulnerable groups from the impacts of climate change. For example, older people, people on lower incomes, people with existing mental ill health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people in remote areas are especially vulnerable to impacts of climate change on their physical and mental health and wellbeing ^(e.g., 18,35–40). Climate change poses widespread threats to diverse populations, and inclusive legislation is essential to address the broader spectrum of risks and impacts, fostering a resilient and sustainable future for everyone. Balancing a focus on the vulnerable, such as, but not limited to children and young people, with broader safeguarding measures for all Australians contributes to a more inclusive and effective response to the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change⁴¹.
- The APS calls for the Government to commit to a subsequent review of the Bill should it be passed. This review should gauge the effectiveness of the legislation in fulfilling its intended goals, particularly in preventing harm to the health and wellbeing of both current and future Australian children. It is essential



that such a review involve the Government partnering with researchers, health professionals such as psychologists and children, youth and families, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the legislation's impact and to inform any necessary future adjustments.

• The APS consistently advocates for children and young people needing more support for their health and social-emotional wellbeing as a matter of national priority^{3,42}. This becomes even more critical in the face of the impact of climate change and natural disasters on the mental health of our children and youth. Adequate support requires sustained Government funding for prevention and early intervention programs for building resilience, enhancing coping strategies and providing a sense of optimism for the future. The nation also needs funding and support for more psychologists in schools and in-school programs to acknowledge the impact of climate change anxiety and to help young people build resilience to improve their mental health and well-being⁴².



References

- 1. Australian Psychological Society. (2020). *Psychology and Climate Change: Position Statement*. https://psychology.org.au/getmedia/c876613b-7f96-4456-8975-1a82190ec1d2/20aps-position_statementpsychology_climate-change.pdf
- 2. Australian Psychological Society. (2023). APS Response to the National Health and Climate Strategy. https://psychology.org.au/psychology/advocacy/submissions/professional-practice/2023/response-to-thenational-health-and-climate-st-(1)
- Australian Psychological Society. (2023). APS Pre-budget submission 2023-24—Build, support, prepare: Investing in Australia's future. Australian Psychological Society. https://psychology.org.au/psychology/advocacy/submissions/professional-practice/2023/aps-pre-budgetsubmission-2023-24
- 4. IPCC. (2023). Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Synthesis Report. https://www.ipcc.ch/ar6-syr/
- 5. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2023). Sustainable development goals. https://sdgs.un.org/goals
- 6. Australian Academy of Science. (2023). *Climate change hub: Science and solutions*. https://www.science.org.au/climate-change-hub
- Rice, M., Hughes, L., Steffen, W., Bradshaw, S., Bambrick, H., Hutley, N., Arndt, D., Dean, A., & Morgan, W. (n.d.). A supercharged climate: Rain bombs, flash flooding and destruction. Climate Council. Retrieved November 20, 2023, from https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Final_Embargoed-Copy_Flooding-A-Supercharged-Climate_Climate-Council_ILedit_220310.pdf
- Watts, N., Amann, M., Arnell, N., Ayeb-Karlsson, S., Belesova, K., Berry, H., Bouley, T., Boykoff, M., Byass, P., & Cai, W. (2018). The 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: Shaping the health of nations for centuries to come. *The Lancet*, *392*(10163), 2479–2514.
- Romanello, M., Napoli, C. di, Green, C., Kennard, H., Lampard, P., Scamman, D., Walawender, M., Ali, Z., Ameli, N., Ayeb-Karlsson, S., Beggs, P. J., Belesova, K., Ford, L. B., Bowen, K., Cai, W., Callaghan, M., Campbell-Lendrum, D., Chambers, J., Cross, T. J., ... Costello, A. (2023). The 2023 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: The imperative for a health-centred response in a world facing irreversible harms. *The Lancet, Online first*. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)01859-7
- 10. Cianconi, P., Betrò, S., & Janiri, L. (2020). The impact of climate change on mental health: A systematic descriptive review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, *11*, 74.
- 11. Hayes, K., Blashki, G., Wiseman, J., Burke, S., & Reifels, L. (2018). Climate change and mental health: Risks, impacts and priority actions. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, *12*(1), 1–12.
- 12. Clayton, S. (2020). Climate anxiety: Psychological responses to climate change. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 74*, 102263. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2020.102263
- 13. Mission Australia. (2022). Youth Survey Report 2022. https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youthsurvey/2618-youth-survey-2022-report/file
- 14. Orygen & Mission Australia. (2023). Climate concerns and young people's mental health: Findings from the 2022 Mission Australia Youth Survey. https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/3004climate-concerns-and-young-people-s-mental-health-findings-from-the-2022-mission-australia-youth-survey-1/file
- 15. Teo, S. M., Gao, C. X., Brennan, N., Fava, N., Simmons, M. B., Baker, D., Zbukvic, I., Rickwood, D. J., Brown, E., & Smith, C. L. (2023). *Climate change concerns impact on young Australians' psychological distress and outlook for the future*.
- 16. Burke, S. E. L., Sanson, A. V., & Van Hoorn, J. (2018). The psychological effects of climate change on children. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 20(5), 35. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-018-0896-9
- 17. Vergunst, F., & Berry, H. L. (2022). Climate change and children's mental health: A developmental perspective. *Clinical Psychological Science*, *10*(4), 767–785. https://doi.org/10.1177/21677026211040787
- 18. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Let's talk about the weather: Injuries related to extreme weather*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/injury/extreme-weather-injuries/contents/summary



- 19. Vergunst, F., & Berry, H. L. (2023, November 19). 5 reasons why climate change may see more of us turn to alcohol and other drugs. *The Conversation*. http://theconversation.com/5-reasons-why-climate-change-may-seemore-of-us-turn-to-alcohol-and-other-drugs-217894
- 20. World Health Organization (WHO). (2023). Protecting maternal, newborn and child health from the impacts of climate change: Call for action. https://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789240085350
- 21. Barkin, J. L., Philipsborn, R. P., Curry, C. L., Upadhyay, S., Geller, P. A., Pardon, M., Dimmock, J., Bridges, C. C., Sikes, C. A., Kondracki, A. J., & Buoli, M. (2022). Climate change is an emerging threat to perinatal mental health. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 107839032211398. https://doi.org/10.1177/10783903221139831
- 22. Olson, D. M., & Metz, G. A. (2020). Climate change is a major stressor causing poor pregnancy outcomes and child development. *F1000Research*, *9*. https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.27157.1
- 23. Ha, S. (2022). The changing climate and pregnancy health. Current Environmental Health Reports, 9(2), 263–275.
- 24. Lawrence, D., Johnson, S., Hafekost, J., Boterhoven De Haan, K., Sawyer, M., Ainley, J., & Zubrick, S. (2015). *The mental health of children and adolescents: Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*. Commonwealth of Australia. http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-m-child2
- 25. Sawyer, M. G., Reece, C. E., Sawyer, A. C., Johnson, S. E., & Lawrence, D. (2018). Has the prevalence of child and adolescent mental disorders in Australia changed between 1998 and 2013 to 2014? *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *57*(5), 343–350.
- 26. Policy report: Defining the missing middle. (n.d.). Orygen. https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Defining-the-missingmiddle/orygen-defining-the-missing-middle-pdf.aspx?ext=
- 27. Duffy, C., & Thorne, L. (2023, September 17). "Nervous rants" and crying at school: Teachers say poor mental health is the biggest issue facing Australia's youth. *ABC News*. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-18/mental-health-depression-anxiety-support-coming-for-schools/102831464
- 28. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020-21*. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release
- 29. Highet, N. J. & Expert Working Group and Expert Subcommittees. (2023). *Mental health care in the perinatal period: Australian clinical practice guidelines—2023 revision*. Centre for Perinatal Excellence (COPE). https://www.cope.org.au/wp
 - content/uploads/2023/06/COPE_2023_Perinatal_Mental_Health_Practice_Guideline.pdf
- Mulraney, M., Coghill, D., Bishop, C., Mehmed, Y., Sciberras, E., Sawyer, M., Efron, D., & Hiscock, H. (2021). A systematic review of the persistence of childhood mental health problems into adulthood. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 129, 182–205.
- 31. Guy, S., Furber, G., Leach, M., & Segal, L. (2016). How many children in Australia are at risk of adult mental illness? *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 50(12), 1146–1160.
- 32. Erlangsen, A., Andersen, P. K., Toender, A., Laursen, T. M., Nordentoft, M., & Canudas-Romo, V. (2017). Causespecific life-years lost in people with mental disorders: A nationwide, register-based cohort study. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 4(12), 937–945. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(17)30429-7
- 33. Productivity Commission. (2020). Mental Health, Report no. 95.
 - https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report
- 34. Fatima, Y., Liu, Y., Cleary, A., Dean, J., Smith, V., King, S., & Solomon, S. (2023). Connecting the health of country with the health of people: Application of "caring for country" in improving the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people in Australia and New Zealand. *The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific, 31*, 100648. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2022.100648
- 35. Trombley, J., Chalupka, S., & Anderko, L. (2017). Climate change and mental health. *AJN, American Journal of Nursing*, *117*(4), 44–52. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NAJ.0000515232.51795.fa
- 36. Schmeltz, M. T., & Gamble, J. L. (2017). Risk characterization of hospitalizations for mental illness and/or behavioral disorders with concurrent heat-related illness. *PLOS ONE*, 12(10), e0186509. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0186509



- 37. Palinkas, L. A., & Wong, M. (2020). Global climate change and mental health. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 32, 12–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.06.023
- 38. Lansbury Hall, N., & Crosby, L. (2022). Climate change impacts on health in remote indigenous communities in Australia. International Journal of Environmental Health Research, 32(3), 487–502. https://doi.org/10.1080/09603123.2020.1777948
- 39. Vecchio, E. A., Dickson, M., & Zhang, Y. (2022). Indigenous mental health and climate change: A systematic literature review. *The Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 6, 100121. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2022.100121
- 40. Oberai, M., Baker, S., Warburton, J., & Rutherford, S. (2023, October). *What increased heat means for older Australians*. https://www.aag.asn.au/Web/Web/Stay-Informed/AAG-500/What-increased-heat-means-forolder-Australians.aspx
- 41. Morison, E. (2023). *Climate of the nation 2023* (Australia) [Report]. The Australia Institute. https://apo.org.au/node/324288
- 42. Australian Psychological Society. (2022). *Psychologists in schools: Position Statement*. APS. https://psychology.org.au/getmedia/3478fa00-0a90-43ff-8d90-99a42ea53981/22aps-ps-psyschp1.pdftarget=