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Australian
HEALTH
PROMOTION
Association

Australian health groups join global call on G7 nations to phase out coal

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Health groups in Australia are part of a global effort involving more than 300,000 doctors, nurses and public health professionals and advocates from 30 countries calling on G7 nations to accelerate the transition away from coal to save lives.

Climate and Health Alliance (Australia), Australian Health Promotion Association and Doctors Reform Society are among 82 organisations signing a [Global Health Statement](#) outlining the huge benefits to both human health and economies from shifting away from coal.

Using coal to generate electricity worsens respiratory and cardiovascular disease in local populations and is one of the largest single contributors to climate change, described as “the greatest threat to global health of the 21st century” by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The G7 meeting in Japan this month will be one of the first major international gatherings since leaders committed to meaningful climate- action in Paris, and will include discussions on strengthening responses to public- health emergencies.

Signatories to the Global Health Statement say all G7 countries need to speed their efforts to phase out coal to prevent the worst health effects of climate change. They say momentum is building among many G7 countries, but Australia is moving in the opposite direction, expanding coal and failing to support the transition to renewable energy.

“Australia’s behaviour is inconsistent and counter to its own and global interests on energy policy – with the ink barely dry from signing the global climate Paris Agreement last month, the Environment Minister raced home to approve yet another mega-coal mine in Qld,” Dr Liz Hanna, Climate and Health Alliance president said.

“Australian health professionals are increasingly concerned about the impacts on the health of the Australian and global population from climate change – and the increased burden on the health sector from illnesses associated, for example with the air pollution caused by coal and diesel combustion. We want Australia (and the rest of the G7) to shift to cleaner, healthier energy sources, and source more electricity from the sun and the wind – this is better for people’s health, and better for the planet,” Gemma Crawford, president of the Australian Health Promotion Association, said.

“Air pollution causes millions of deaths globally each year. Coal is a major contributor to this toll. It is unconscionable that Australia is continuing to develop its coal resources at the same time as agreeing to work to limit global warming to less than 1.5 degrees (as per the Paris Agreement). We need to see leadership from the Australian government, and all G7 nations, at the upcoming meeting in Japan. Speeding our world’s transition from coal is vital to both public health and a safe climate,” Dr Brett Montgomery, Doctors Reform Society spokesperson, said.

The Global Health Statement on coal plants is available here: <https://cape.ca/global-health-statement-on-coal-plants/>

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Notes:

1) Indoor and outdoor air pollution combined cause an estimated 8 million deaths per year. Outdoor air pollution is responsible for 3.7 million of these deaths. World Health Organisation WHA 2016 Draft Resolution. A69 18 (May 6, 2016, http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA69/A69_18-en.pdf).

2) Renewable energy and energy efficiency are readily available alternatives to coal power that reduce negative health impacts. Momentum is building as a number of G7 jurisdictions are already taking action on coal:

- Ontario, Canada, completed a total phase--out of 7,560 megawatts of coal power in 2014, while Alberta will phase out 6,200 megawatts of coal power by 2030
- Oregon in the United States, will phase out coal power by 2040, while New York state will phase out coal power by 2020
- The United Kingdom will be coal free by 2025, and coal plants are already being taken offline
- France, Germany, the UK and the US have ended financing for overseas coal-fired plants except in rare circumstances