

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION**  
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**The effects on our health system of climate change and energy instability**

New Zealand health sector is facing catastrophe if the country doesn't prepare itself for a future without fossil fuels. This warning was given at the Public Health Association annual conference at Tūrangawaewae Marae in Ngaruawahia.

Dr David Sinclair of AUT University told delegates that greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by at least 80 percent by 2050 to limit catastrophic climate change.

"This will have major flow-on effects to the economy, and hence to New Zealand's health services. Our greenhouse gas emissions have actually risen since 1990 and even the current recession has made little difference to global fossil fuel use."

Dr Sinclair told delegates that the range and availability of health services the country can provide is closely tied to the economy and depends on complicated factors.

"New Zealand's health sector imports virtually all its medicines, most of its medical equipment and a lot of its supplies. Manufacturing and importing these currently depends on cheap fossil fuels, but as fuel becomes really expensive and supply is limited globally, we can expect these costs to rise substantially," he said.

"Adapting to climate change will affect the decisions types of health and community services we provide, and what gets priority and funding. Health and community services are already under strain from an increasing and ageing population and capacity to meet demands is limited by financial constraints, lack of facilities, international competition for New Zealand's health professionals, and a shrinking proportion of young people generating the income to pay for services.

"Adding climate change adaptation to the mix makes the situation much more complex."

Dr Sinclair presented four scenarios about what New Zealand society might be like in 30 years' time depending on the severity of climate change and the energy situation. Each showed how climate change might affect the country, our health and health services.

- In one scenario, the country attempts to keep the economy much as it is with a surge of technology innovation and energy efficiency.
- The second scenario focuses on local green technology, highly efficient cities and neighbourhood renewal.
- In the third scenario, the country goes through a bottom-up rethink, aiming for prosperity without growth.
- In the final scenario, lack of preparation for severe climate change and rapid decline in fossil fuels lead to a fragmented and divided "triage" society, continually responding to crises.

One of the 'what ifs' discussed was the prospect of many climate refugees from Australia migrating here in the next 30 years because of severe drought.

"In all these scenarios, life for many people gets difficult, and there are serious issues about what health and community services can be provided, how they are funded, and who gets access to services. This raises some important ethical and policy questions," Dr Sinclair said.

"We certainly have the ability to work through the implications of climate change and energy on our health and services, but have we left ourselves enough time to prepare?"

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