

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

POLICY STATEMENT

Climate change is a priority issue impacting on the natural environment and on the health and wellbeing of Australians and the global community. Family Planning Australia is committed to identifying and implementing practical strategies to:

- Work sustainably to mitigate risks and reduce our organisation's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions to minimise further contributing to climate change
- Embed strategies for adaptation and resilience in our own operations
- Work with our partners in the Pacific to support them to develop mitigation, adaptation and resilience strategies relevant to their contexts and capacities.

BACKGROUND

Climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights

Climate change impacts population health and health systems and is inextricably linked to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality. Yet the link is poorly understood and the impacts of climate change on SRHR are often overlooked. The climate crisis has implications for social, emotional, cultural, and economic health and wellbeing, particularly for women and girls, including on their SRHR. Gender, sexuality, age, wealth, indigeneity, and ethnicity are all determining factors in terms of vulnerability to climate change.⁽¹⁾ More generally, people facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are likely to experience barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services, and the climate crisis intersects with and worsens the status quo.^(1,2)

As global temperatures rise, extreme weather events like floods, droughts, and heatwaves are becoming more frequent and severe. This results in increased demand

for health services and reduced capacity to deliver them, both in New South Wales and in Pacific contexts. In resource-constrained settings, crisis situations, and in conflict and humanitarian crises, access to SRH services and information often becomes limited or non-existent. This particularly threatens the health and rights of girls and women and other priority population groups.⁽¹⁻⁴⁾ Limited access to SRH services are among the leading causes of illness and death for women and girls in such contexts, due to conditions such as pregnancy and childbirth-related complications, poor obstetric care, unsafe abortions and increased gender based violence.⁽³⁻⁵⁾ This underscores the importance of seeing these as essential health services.

The Australian context

Climate change impacts Australian health systems and services and there is evidence to demonstrate it also has a negative impact on the health outcomes of Australians.⁽⁶⁾ Health services are therefore a vital part of addressing health issues arising from climate change but must also analyse their operations to reduce the ways in which they may be contributing to the issue.

To date, there has been limited exploration of how climate change impacts are gendered in Australia, and more specifically the direct and indirect impact of climate change on SRHR in NSW and Australia more broadly. Further research is needed to articulate what these impacts are and their extent, building on the available evidence of climate change impacts more broadly in Australia, and extending on understandings from other contexts globally.

SRHR should be recognised as an important element of climate change adaptation and resilience, given it is critical to advancing gender equality and overall health and wellbeing, and by strengthening individuals' and communities' resilience and capacity to adapt.

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The Pacific context

Family Planning Australia has been working in the Pacific region since 2008. Our approach is to develop collaborative partnerships at local, national, and international levels.⁽⁷⁾ The climate crisis is at the forefront of the Pacific region's immediate concerns, with local leaders urging all nations towards climate action within the next decade. The Pacific is considered one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world, exposed to a wide variety of increasingly frequent natural disasters, driven by the climate crisis.⁽²⁾

Pacific countries are particularly vulnerable due to their geographic location and characteristics and experience a unique set of health risks and vulnerabilities. Atoll nations, including Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Federated States of Micronesia, are particularly affected by rising sea levels and storm surges. Children in Papua New Guinea will face twice as many bushfires and over ten times as many heatwaves as their grandparents' generation. Children in Vanuatu will face nearly three more times droughts.⁽⁸⁾

There is growing discussion about the impact of climate change on SRHR in the Pacific.^(9,10) The impacts of climate change are magnified in these low resource environments, such as by disrupting the delivery of medical supplies. In the Pacific, severe rationing of water often affects health centres being able to operate and provide SRH care, including maternity services. The impact on young people is also disproportionate, given the high proportion of children and young people in the population. It is also predicted to cause the displacement of populations in this region, leading to further disadvantage for displaced people as they seek to establish themselves in new locations. The health, social and economic stresses caused by events such as conflict,

migration, droughts and cyclones negatively affect SRHR directly due to inadequate access to health services and information, as well as indirectly, with increases in sexual and gender-based violence, sex work, drug use as well as rising rates of child, early and forced marriages.^(1,2,11-13)

The urgency of the climate crisis, in addition to Family Planning Australia's long-lasting partnerships and strong ties to the Pacific region, means we have a responsibility to commit to climate action due to the immediate and acute affects felt by our Pacific counterparts.

Links to the SDGs

Implementation of this policy will promote achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including:

SDG 3 – Good health and well-being

SDG 5 – Gender equality

SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities

SDG 13 – Climate action

SCOPE

All Family Planning Australia staff, board and board committees.

POLICY DETAILS

Family Planning Australia recognises that:

- Impacts of climate change have detrimental effects on individuals' SRHR, including a negative impact on maternal health (such as due to rising temperatures), and create conditions that result in increases in gender-based violence, including harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage.^(1,2,11)
- Countries which have contributed least to climate change are also the countries most affected by it.^(1, 2)

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- Pacific countries are particularly vulnerable to climate change due to their geographic location and characteristics. The impacts of climate change are also magnified in these low resource environments, particularly for women, girls and priority population groups in these countries.^(1,2)
- Population growth is not a main contributor to climate change. Taking a social justice and rights-based approach to SRHR is imperative to ensure equitable and inclusive access to SRHR services and education.⁽¹⁾
- Applying a nexus approach to both immediate responses and longer-term outcomes can reduce the impact of cyclical or recurrent climate-related shocks and stresses, as it enables focus on the work needed to coherently address people's vulnerability before, during, and after crises.⁽¹⁴⁾
- Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the impacts of climate change. Increased efforts are urgently required globally in climate change financing, policies and interventions to address gender and health inequalities.^(14,15)
- People experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and social inequality, including poverty, race, disability, age, gender and sexual orientation, are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Strategies for planning and adaptation must therefore take an intersectional and inclusive approach to ensure such inequalities are addressed.^(1,14,16,17)

Family Planning Australia believes that:

- All people have a right to accessible sexual and reproductive health information and services.
- Sexual and reproductive health is essential healthcare. Governments should invest in ensuring all people have access to these services, regardless of postcode, level of income, gender or background.
- Governments in Australia and the Pacific need to commit to building more resilient health systems, including delivery of SRHR services as part of climate disaster recovery strategies, which can reduce the impacts of climate change on people, particularly vulnerable populations.⁽¹⁾
- Adaptation strategies in Australia and the Pacific need to include SRHR, recognising that populations who face socioeconomic, cultural, and political barriers to the realisation of their SRHR have an increased vulnerability to climate change. Recognising and addressing existing inequalities is therefore essential in order to build adaptive capacity effectively for all populations.⁽¹⁾
- Consistent access to SRHR services and education is a key component of supporting gender equality and the capacity of women and girls to develop resilience and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Reproductive choice and autonomy enables girls and women to complete their education, pursue careers and take on decision making roles in the community, in workplaces and in government. This results in greater economic stability and agency, particularly when facing climate disasters, and contribute to developing strategies and solutions which support all parts of society to respond to climate issues.⁽¹⁵⁾

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- Strategies to prevent and address the impact of climate change effectively are best developed in consultation with stakeholders who are involved and impacted, including priority population groups in Australia and in the Pacific.

Family Planning Australia is committed to:

- Planning, implementing and evaluating a range of strategies addressing the impact of climate change on our organisation and on SRHR, framed by a rights based approach which supports gender equality and is inclusive of priority population groups.
- Taking a collaborative and consultative approach wherever possible when developing plans and strategies for climate change mitigation and adaptation to ensure resulting actions are appropriate and acceptable to affected stakeholders and their circumstances and contexts, which is likely to optimise effectiveness in implementation.
- Working sustainably to reduce our organisation's carbon footprint to minimise contributing further to climate change, such as:
 - increasing energy and water efficiency
 - reducing waste
- Implementing adaptation and resilience strategies in order to address the impacts of climate change in our operations, such as:
 - providing training to our workforce to develop an understanding of climate change and its impacts and clients effectively when experiencing health impacts of climate change
 - developing plans to support SRHR during crisis and humanitarian situations, such as extreme weather events, and recovery periods
 - contributing to resilient health systems through our practices and advocacy
- Working with partners in the Pacific to support them to develop mitigation, adaptation and resilience strategies relevant to their contexts and capacities, such as developing plans to support SRHR during crisis and humanitarian situations and recovery periods.
- Advocating at local, state, national and international level to highlight the links between climate change and SRHR and advocate for positive change
- Draw from and contribute to the evidence base to ensure high quality service delivery and positive impact, such as:
 - replicating and scaling up successful models or initiatives which have evidence of a positive impact.

Links to other related policies

- Environmental management and sustainability policy
- Gender policy
- International capacity building and sustainability policy
- Environmental and social safeguard policy

Potential to add an infographic to illustrate our main commitments in a visual way to support effective communication with internal and external stakeholders.

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