Climate change and rural child health: Results and new directions from an international collaboration

Bastian Seidel

University of Tasmania, bastian@uow.edu.au
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Keywords
rural, child, health, results, directions, international, climate, collaboration, change

Disciplines
Medicine and Health Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

This conference paper is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/smhpapers/664
Climate change and rural child health: Results and new directions from an international collaboration

Bastian Seidel

Discipline of General Practice, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to human health in the 21st Century. It is known that rural communities, who already experience unequal outcomes and access to health services, are especially vulnerable to the health effects of climate change. Within these vulnerable communities, rural children are a very ‘at risk’ group that has received little attention in the climate change and health research. This presentation describes the lessons from a 2011 international edited collection of evidence (a book and a special issue of a journal) that aimed to build the evidence base for understanding climate change effects on rural child health. It brought together some of the world’s leading climate and health researchers and asked them to describe the evidence for the health effects of climate change on rural children. The presenter is a rural general practitioner with postgraduate qualifications in paediatrics and one of the collection’s editors. He discusses the evidence the project delivered in terms of his practical ‘first hand’ experience of the kind of research needed to make a difference to such climate-vulnerable regions. The presenter first describes the value of theory for understanding climate and rural child health effects and the usefulness of a social determinants of health model. He then discusses the importance of evidence contributing researchers provided for disease-specific climate effects on rural children: flooding and infectious diseases, diarrhoeal disease, trematode and nematode diseases, allergic respiratory disease, as well as mental health. He further details the implications of evidence international contributors presented for health effects on indigenous children and children living on pacific islands. He concludes with specific directions for developing a better evidence-base for climate effects on rural child health, emphasising the importance of considering local-level dynamics and research methods that capture such dynamics.