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Media Release

New AIA report highlights inextricable link between the environment and our health

Globally, almost a quarter of all annual deaths can be linked to the environment

8 July 2022 – Leading life, health and wellbeing insurer AIA Australia has released a new report highlighting the widespread impact that human interactions with the environment have on health - further demonstrating its commitment to address the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Globally, almost a quarter of the 12.6 million annual deaths are linked to the environment and nearly two-thirds of these are attributable to NCDs such as cancer and diabetes. AIA's new report, "**The Environment and our Health**", builds on its 5590+ report and summarises existing evidence and scientific literature, highlighting the bidirectional connection between our health and environmental factors such as air pollution and climate change. By raising awareness of the environment-health connection, the insurer hopes to empower collective action and innovative solutions that will lead to positive outcomes for all people and the planet.

Key insights from the report include:

- **Climate change**, recognised as the biggest global threat of the 21st century by The Lancet in 2009ⁱ, directly and indirectly increases risk of NCDs. It can impact our health in a myriad of ways including directly via trauma related to extreme weather events (such as floods and heat waves)^{ii iii} or indirectly through long-term emotional distress triggered by threats to the current and future wellbeing of the earth and its people^{iv}.
- **Air pollution** is the second leading cause of global NCDs, second only to smoking tobacco. Globally, almost one-third of cardiovascular diseases are caused by air pollution consisting of household air pollution (17 percent), ambient air pollution (13 percent), second-hand tobacco smoke (three percent) and exposure to lead (2 percent)^v
- **Agriculture and food production** is a major cause of global environmental change^{vi} with obesity and diet related NCDs driven mainly by unhealthy diets with related impacts also including an 80 percent increase in the prevalence of diabetes globally and an 860 percent increase in the use of nitrogen fertiliser globally.^{vii}
- **Urbanisation and the built environment** also have a huge influence on physical and mental health, with well-planned cities having the potential to promote health and wellbeing^{viii} through initiatives such as green spaces, walking and cycling paths, recreational facilities and sports infrastructure.

CEO of AIA Australia, Damien Mu, said that the impact of the environment on our health is a societal issue requiring urgent attention.

"At AIA Australia, our purpose is to make a difference in people's lives, and we're passionate about developing and supporting initiatives that focus on health prevention and promotion to reduce the prevalence of chronic illnesses.

"We are at a critical point where we, as a society need to take concrete steps to improve the way we interact with the environment. Encouraging policies and programs that consider both the impact on

the environment and how those then exacerbate NCDs – is an upstream preventative approach that governments and corporates should embrace for the benefit of all Australians,” he added.

“At an individual level, focusing on the small ‘somethings’ – such as choosing a healthy and planet-friendly diet which increases nutrient intake, or taking public transport to reduce vehicle emissions – can make a huge difference to the long-term health of our nation and planet.”

The insights from “The Environment and Our Health” have been incorporated into AIA Australia’s wellbeing strategy, as highlighted in its 5590+ framework. For more information on the research linking the environment and its impact on non-communicable diseases, please see the full report <https://www.aia.com.au/content/dam/au/en/docs/reports/the-environment-and-our-health.pdf>.

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About AIA Australia

AIA Australia is a leading life insurance specialist with 50 years’ experience and a commitment to help Australians live healthier, longer, better lives. In 2014 the company launched AIA Vitality, a world leading, science-based health and wellbeing program, to the Australian market. In July 2017, AIA and its partners launched AIA’s health insurance business, now known as AIA Health Insurance.

In 2021, CommInsure Life was integrated into AIA Australia. The lives of more than 3.8 million Australians are protected and enhanced through AIA Australia’s unique value proposition of life, health and wellbeing. Our vision is to embrace shared value in championing Australia to be the healthiest and best protected nation in the world.

AIA Australia has been recognised with multiple awards, including the Women in Finance Employer of the Year Award (2018, 2019), Super Review’s Best Insurer of the Year (2018, 2019), FSC Life Insurance Industry Awards Innovation in Group Life Insurance (2021), Shared Value Awards Corporate Organisation Leading Through Shared Value (2019), Shared Value Awards Organisation of the Year (2020) and Shared Value Project of the Year (2021).

Further information at www.aia.com.au.

AIA Australia’s 5590+ report

In 2021, AIA Australia released its [5590+ report](#) which highlights how five individually modifiable behavioural factors – physical inactivity, poor nutrition, smoking, excess alcohol, and our interaction with the environment – lead to five major non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – cancer, diabetes, respiratory disease, cardiovascular diseases, and mental health conditions and disorders – which are responsible for over 90 per cent of deaths in Australia. As part of its work to address the prevalence of these mostly preventable diseases, AIA Australia wants to empower Australians to introduce some small somethings to help reduce their risk of chronic illness.

AIA Group’s ESG strategy

AIA Australia is proud to be part of the AIA Group’s ESG strategy. ESG is fundamental to our purpose of making a difference in people’s lives, and supporting Australians to live healthier, longer, better lives.

As part of the AIA Group’s overarching Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategy, AIA has committed to achieving net-zero greenhouse emissions by 2050. AIA has also committed to the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), a global body enabling businesses to set ambitious emissions reductions targets in line with the latest climate science.

Based on the estimation that planting one trillion trees globally could arrest the effects of climate change, and with Australia constituting one of six nations that represent 50 percent of the reforestation opportunity, a key pillar of AIA Australia’s local ESG strategy is also tree planting.

Further information available at: <https://www.aia.com.au/en/individual/about-aia/our-commitments/esg.html>

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ⁱCostello, A., Abbas, M., Allen, A., Ball, S., Bell, S., Bellamy, R., Friel, S., Groce, N., Johnson, A., Kett, M., Lee, M., Levy, C., Maslin, M., McCoy, D., McGuire, B., Montgomery, H., Napier, D., Pagel, C., Patel, J., de Oliveira, J.A.P., Redclift, N., Rees, H., Rogger, D., Scott, J., Stephenson, J., Twigg, J., Wolff, J. and Patterson, C. (2009). Managing the health effects of climate change. *The Lancet*, [online] 373(9676), pp.1693–1733. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(09\)60935-1/fulltext?code=lancet-site](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(09)60935-1/fulltext?code=lancet-site) [Accessed 23 May 2019].

ⁱⁱ Berry HL, Bowen K, Kjellstrom T. Climate change and mental health: a causal pathways framework. *Int J Public Health*. 2010;55(2):123–32.

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^{vi} Garnett T. Plating up solutions. *Science* 2016; 353: 1202–04

^{vii} Clark, M., Hill, J. and Tilman, D. (2018). The Diet, Health, and Environment Trilemma. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 43(1), pp.109–134.

^{viii} Saelens BE, Handy SL. Built environment correlates of walking: a review. *Med Sci Sport Exer*. 2008;40(7 Suppl):S550-66