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## **Public Health at Risk: EHA Calls for Urgent \$234.3M Investment to Rebuild Australia’s Environmental Health Workforce**

*By strengthening the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) workforce, Australia can save billions in productivity costs, reduce foodborne illnesses, and enhance national public health resilience.*

**BRISBANE, QLD, February 10 2025**

Australia is facing a critical shortage of Environmental Health Officers (EHOs), leaving communities vulnerable to foodborne illness outbreaks, water contamination, air pollution, and climate-driven disease threats. As part of the \$234.3 million, Environmental Health Australia (EHA) is calling on the Australian Government to invest \$145.5 million over four years to rebuild the workforce by reopening and strengthening accredited university programs.

With a 30% workforce shortfall, an ageing profession, and the closure of three accredited programs, Australia no longer has the environmental health expertise needed to protect public safety and respond to disasters. Without urgent investment, preventable public health crises will escalate, further straining hospitals and emergency response services.

### **Climate Disasters Are Escalating – And We Don’t Have Enough EHOs**

Recent months have seen:

- Devastating floods in Northern Queensland
- Bushfires in Victoria and Western Australia
- Severe heat waves across multiple states

These disasters have led to polluted water supplies, unsafe food, compromised air quality, and increased disease risks. EHOs are the frontline public health professionals ensuring clean drinking water, safe food, and breathable air—yet severe workforce shortages mean many communities lack essential protection in emergencies.

"Every disaster brings immediate risks to public health," said James Williams, EHA Queensland President . "From contaminated water to foodborne illness outbreaks in evacuation centres, Environmental Health Officers are the unseen first responders keeping communities safe."

### **We Need Urgent Investment in the EHO Workforce**

EHA is already delivering essential disaster response training, with 30 EHOs completing the sought-after Environmental Health Disaster Management Course in Townsville each year. However, this is not enough to meet growing national needs.

"If we don't invest in rebuilding the workforce now, we will pay the price in future public health crises," Williams warned.

EHA's 2025–26 Pre-Budget Submission calls on the Australian Government to commit \$145.5 million over four years to:

- Reopen accredited Environmental Health university programs
- Strengthen disaster response training for EHOs
- Expand the EHO workforce to meet Australia's growing emergency response needs

The time to act is now. Without immediate investment, Australians will remain exposed to escalating public health risks.

*The submission document can be seen here: <https://www.eh.org.au/documents/item/1658>*

*"We protect people from hazards in their environment!"  
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