

**Margaret Loughnan, Department of Geography and Environmental Science Monash University.**

I am a PhD candidate in the School of Geography and Environmental Science at Monash University. My particular area of interest is environmental health. My PhD is based upon developing a population-based approach to describe possible relationships between climate and non-fatal acute myocardial infarctions (heart attacks) in Melbourne Australia. My aims are to provide information that has assimilated climatic knowledge into population health outcomes with the aim of identifying the environmental determinants of cardiac events and subsequently contribute to preventative medicine through public education and behavioural adaptation, I believe this type of approach is consistent with the WAS\*IS objectives.

I feel the economic, social and environmental characteristics of a sustainable society are the same as those required for a healthy society. Therefore, the concepts of health and environmental justice should be foremost in the development of both national and local strategies, which address issues such as climate change.

The literature in Australia to date has not been able to provide strong evidence of the impact of climate change on cardiac events. My research argues that population susceptibility to climate change has not been fully assessed and requires alternative approaches and explanations such as the inclusion of confounding factors like population demographics and socio-economic factors. Thus, the best estimation of future health impacts of climate and climate change will necessarily come from assessments based on current understanding of climate on cardiac health that include a larger range of modulating factors. The aim of my project is to use health surveillance data and daily climate data to determine whether any observed changes in heart attack incidence is related to local temperatures. This has been assessed at a seasonal to daily level and threshold temperatures above and below which there are significant increases in heart attacks have been identified. By recognising that the susceptible population is not a homogenous group and is therefore unlikely, to respond to environmental stressors such as climate in a uniform way my study has deconstructed the susceptible population into age and gender groupings as well as specific types of heart attacks. This has led to the identification of the most vulnerable populations. In addition, this information has been mapped and compared with SEIFA (socio-economic index) thereby presenting information to healthcare providers identifying which groups are most likely to be affected by climate, where they are located and how socio-economic demographics relate to health status and the impact of environmental factors such as climate. I think this is the type of launching pad that is required to estimate the future health effects of climate change, and WAS\*IS can contribute to this by fostering interdisciplinary approaches to environmental problems.

Opportunities such as the WAS\*IS workshop allows scientists to confront many of the difficulties that face interdisciplinary researches, and will hopefully lead to future pathways that incorporate both physical and social scientists in policy formation, decision making and public education . I have a healthcare background and the WAS\*IS workshop would provide me with an opportunity to learn from researchers and experts in physical climatological science and share my knowledge of public health with them. I would also enjoy meeting other people with similar interests and aspirations as myself. I have a keen interest in environmental health and environmental and social justice. This has been demonstrated through my participation in overseas aide projects in Tanzania, Tuvalu, Fiji and Samoa, where I have worked as a nurse and educator with various healthcare teams. In the future, I would like to combine this aide work with my research in developing countries, which are already experiencing an increase in climate related health outcomes such as malaria, diarrhoea and malnutrition. Participation in the WAS\*IS workshop would help me to pursue this goal.