

POSITION STATEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH IN THE PACIFIC

As an international health not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving health in Pacific island countries, Rocketship acknowledges the critically important roles that the environment and climate change play in the health of human populations across the Pacific and the vital role that strong primary healthcare systems play in addressing the social and environmental determinants of health. Over the last several decades, as the evidence has grown regarding the detrimental health impacts of climate change, Pacific island countries have been increasingly viewed as the ‘canaries in the coalmine’. They are among the countries in the world who have contributed least to the problem but stand to lose the most.

Climate change is well understood to act as a multiplier or amplifier of health threats, which in the Pacific means that the existing burdens of infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases (including problems related to food and nutrition security), trauma (including from hydrometeorological disasters such as cyclones) and psychosocial ill-health are already being – and will continue to be – exacerbated by climate change. Furthermore, climate change represents an existential issue for many Pacific island people, whose nationhood, sovereignty and identity are all under threat as the oceans continue to warm, acidify and rise, leading to loss of land and livelihoods and contributing to population displacement.

Rocketship’s mission and objectives align with the ‘Healthy Islands’ vision – the fundamental policy imperative for health systems strengthening shared by all countries in the Pacific region – which has five key concepts at its core:

- 1) Children are nurtured in body and mind;
- 2) Environments invite learning and leisure;
- 3) People work and age with dignity;
- 4) Ecological balance is a source of pride; and
- 5) The ocean which sustains us is protected.

Rocketship’s commitment to working in partnership to improve health in Pacific island countries thus both respects the ‘Healthy Islands’ vision and reaffirms the critical importance of primary health care as the principal means by which to achieve better health for Pacific island people, including in the face of climate change. While every possible effort must be made to slow, halt and reverse climate change at a global level, primary health care systems must be strengthened to cope with its consequences.