



# HEALTHY & CLIMATE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation recognises the importance of health equity in strengthening community resilience to climate change and disasters.

**Impacts of climate change and disasters, including pandemics, typically follow patterns of inequities**

**A regenerative and just food system is an essential ingredient for healthy and climate resilient communities**

**Community service and health organisations are on the frontlines of supporting community health and climate resilience**

Our health and resilience depend on many interconnected factors, including a healthy environment, a sense of purpose, social connections, and healthy housing. Yet, through historic and systemic disparities, such factors are not equitably distributed, making some communities more vulnerable than others to disasters and climate change.

For everyone to have equal prospects of good health and a dignified life, our pandemic recovery and climate change actions must improve these determinants of health and support community capacities to nurture healthy and climate resilient futures. In short, the determinants of health are the foundations of resilience, and health equity, the foundation of climate justice.

The Foundation is working towards achieving the following outcomes:

- OUTCOME 1**  
Communities shape regenerative and just climate change resilience.
- OUTCOME 2**  
Greater Melbourne's food systems are equitable, healthy, sustainable, and resilient.
- OUTCOME 3**  
The health and community sectors can support community resilience to climate change and disasters, including pandemics and other shocks.

**Does your organisation's work align with the outcomes of this Impact Area?**

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**Speak to Dr Karyn Bosomworth,**  
Program Manager –  
Healthy & Climate Resilient  
Communities.

(03) 9633 0002

[karyn.bosomworth@lmc.org.au](mailto:karyn.bosomworth@lmc.org.au)



# OUTCOME 1



Communities shape regenerative and just climate change resilience.

**Climate change threatens our health in many ways. It is increasing extreme weather events such as floods, fire weather, heatwaves, and storms. It is also impacting the determinants of good health such as our environment, food systems, community cohesion, economics, mental health, and housing. Even if we stopped all emissions tomorrow, the climate will continue to change for many years, if not decades. This makes emissions reductions and resilience building critical.**

Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation supports work that connects community resilience, climate change action, and health equity. We support work that seeks systems approaches to strengthening community capacities to become more self-determining, socially connected, regenerative, and adaptive.

The Foundation's support is focused on:

- Strengthening community capacities to advance health equity through climate change mitigation and adaptation combined
- Urban leaders supporting community networks focused on equitable health and resilience
- Community-driven, nature-based projects that support health and climate resilience
- Cross-sector collaborations that support equitable disaster resilience, with a particular focus on heat

## Challenge

### Climate change is threatening our health

Climate change is threatening our health in many ways. It is increasing extreme weather events such as floods, fire weather, heatwaves, and storms.<sup>1</sup> It is also impacting the essential determinants of good health, such as liveable urban environments, healthy food, connections to community and culture, sustainable and inclusive economics, mental health, access to health and legal services, and stable, sustainable housing.<sup>2-5</sup>

Consequently, communities already experiencing health inequities are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change and disaster impacts, including pandemics.<sup>6,7</sup> For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, those dealing with precarious housing or work were less able to stay home or distance from others, increasing their risk of catching COVID-19.<sup>8</sup> Increasing heatwaves are particularly concerning for neighbourhoods with little to no vegetation, as they are already significantly hotter than other places. Such heat risks are exacerbated in communities dealing with socio-economic challenges that limit their individual and collective capacities to reduce heat risks.<sup>9</sup> Climate change impacts on food supply chains and costs, worsen the food insecurity many people already face.<sup>10</sup>

We also know that even if we stopped all emissions tomorrow, the climate will continue to change for many years, if not decades.<sup>3</sup> This highlights the urgency for a fast and just transition (see ISEJ impact area), and for strengthening resilience.

### Shaping regenerative and just climate change resilience

For everyone to have the opportunity for a life of dignity in a climate changing world, our resilience efforts must tackle the roots of health inequities while also strengthening abilities to anticipate and proactively absorb shocks, to adapt to and learn from constant change and, to reimagine and proactively shape our futures.<sup>11-13</sup>

Many authorities, including the World Health Organisation, emphasise that regenerative and just resilience requires community-led action combined with addressing the systemic roots of health inequities.<sup>14-17</sup>

Community-led action requires empowered community leaders and people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences having spaces to share what they know and think, sharing in decision-making, and having opportunities to collaborate and co-create solutions.<sup>18-20</sup> It requires social connections and community cohesion, supported by climate resilient community infrastructure, such as community centres, neighbourhood houses, health and legal services, libraries, green spaces, public transport, and healthy food systems.<sup>21,22</sup>

Equally, it is unfair to expect vulnerable and marginalized communities to use their limited resources without real opportunities to address the causes, rather than the symptoms, of health inequities.<sup>23,24</sup> We need to transform societal conditions that allow resilience to grow and be maintained within communities and the ecosystems they rely upon, so that people can thrive and equitably adapt.<sup>25</sup> For example, the latest national State of the Environment report highlights the need to support Indigenous leadership, knowledge, and management of Country to improve Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' wellbeing.<sup>26</sup>

Because such systemic (root cause) change is about transformations in policies, practices, power dynamics, social norms or mindsets that underlie societal issues, it requires authentic collaborations across sectors, places, and policy issues.<sup>27, 28</sup>

Supporting communities to shape regenerative and just resilience requires improved collaboration across issues such as:

- Community disaster resilience, particularly regarding heatwaves
- Harnessing the health benefits of emissions reductions and resilience activities
- Reimagining and re-designing urban environments, transport, and mobility
- Protecting and restoring nature as the foundation of our health and resilience<sup>29</sup>, including urban greening
- Healthy, sustainable, and just food systems (see Outcome 2)
- Resilience of the health and community system itself (See Outcome 3)
- Just transitions (See ISE&J Impact Area)
- Healthy, affordable housing (See HAH Impact Area)

## Our Response

The determinants of health are the foundations of resilience, and equity across those determinants is the foundation of climate justice. Putting health equity at the heart of resilience work, offers the potential for a healthier, fairer, and more sustainable world for all. Connecting community resilience, climate change action, and health equity can strengthen community capacities to become more self-determining, socially connected, regenerative, and adaptive.

### Our support is focused on:

- Community capacities to advance health equity through climate change mitigation and adaptation combined
- Urban leaders strengthening community networks focused on progressing equitable health and resilience
- Community-driven, nature-based resilience projects that support health and climate resilience
- Cross-sector collaborations that support equitable disaster resilience, with a particular focus on heat

**The Foundation will consider other activities that address this outcome.**



# OUTCOME 2



Greater Melbourne's food systems are equitable, healthy, sustainable, and resilient.

**Increasing demand for agricultural products, urban sprawl, climate change and a range of other threatening processes are undermining the security, health, and sustainability of our food system.**

Food production and consumption impacts biodiversity, aquatic and terrestrial resources, climate and a range of other critically important systems.

The food system can also produce less than ideal social outcomes, including limiting access to affordable, nutritious food.

The Foundation's support is focused on:

- Research to better understand the issues threatening the security, health, and sustainability of the food system.
- Evidence-based solutions and pathways to a secure, healthy, resilient, and sustainable food system.
- Research and demonstration projects that influence or produce food system security, health, resilience, and sustainability outcomes.
- First Nations' and locally-led food enterprises and capacities
- Demonstration of more sustainable, low-carbon urban agricultural approaches.

## Challenge

**Our food systems face multiple challenges, exacerbated by climate change**

Food systems have supported human development for millennia. In Australia, First Nations' have cultivated and managed Country for tens of thousands of years.<sup>1</sup> In 2020-21, Australian agriculture accounts for 55 per cent of land use, 25 per cent of water use, 12 per cent of goods and services exports, and 2.5 per cent of employment.<sup>2</sup> Victoria's agriculture currently spans 50 per cent of the state's land area, supports 81,000 jobs and in 2018-19 generated \$15.9B in gross value.<sup>3</sup> Agriculture is important for the regions and supports jobs in other sectors such as tourism and hospitality.<sup>3</sup>

Greater Melbourne is surrounded by a highly productive food bowl that is a valuable source of fresh, healthy food and that makes a significant contribution to the regional economy. Cautious estimates are that urban agriculture, consists of about 450-500 operators; evenly split between commercial and community (including 150 community gardens).<sup>4</sup> There is also a huge diversity of Community Food Enterprises (CFEs) including food hubs, buying groups, community grocers, community kitchens, food cooperatives, and farmers' markets. All these entities play important roles in our health and resilience and that of our food systems.

However, how our food is grown, processed, marketed, distributed, prepared, and even wasted, all create and face challenges. Different parts of our food systems can impact biodiversity, consume natural resources, degrade soils, emit greenhouse gases, impact water systems, and create waste.<sup>5,6</sup> Food supply chains are complex and vulnerable to dynamic environmental and economic conditions, including climate change, the availability of arable land, and water scarcity. Rising demand, coupled with supply constraints, will lead to greater food production vulnerabilities, volatile commodity prices and higher prices.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, climate change is affecting all aspects of our food systems, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and risks.<sup>6,8-10</sup> Changes in seasonal conditions over the last 20 years have reduced Australia's annual average farm profits by around 23 per cent, particularly in the country's south-west and south-east.<sup>11</sup>



Greater Melbourne's food bowl currently has the potential to meet 41 per cent of its food and 82 per cent of its vegetables.<sup>12</sup> However, this capacity is threatened by urban sprawl, climate change, water scarcity, population growth, food waste, farm viability, pandemics, and extreme weather. This capacity will be put under further pressure as the climate changes. If Melbourne grows to the predicted population of 7 to 8 million people by 2050, it will need at least 60 per cent more food, but it will have less land available to produce it. Other Australian food bowls are unlikely to be able to meet deficits in Melbourne's fresh food supply, as they are facing similar pressures.<sup>12</sup>

These challenges are particularly concerning for people already vulnerable to food prices, food insecurity, and limited access nutritious food. In 2020, 1 in 6 Australian adults did not have enough to eat and 1.2 million children went hungry.<sup>13</sup>

Prior to COVID-19, more than one in three of these people had never experienced food insecurity.<sup>13</sup> Between March 2020 and March 2021, 54 per cent of food insecure Australians were accessing government assistance, including 64 per cent of people categorised as already severely food insecure.<sup>13</sup>

### Food could help regenerate our health and resilience

Food is critical to a healthy, just, and regenerative future.<sup>14</sup> The right to food is part of the human right to an adequate standard of living and is about ensuring all people have the capacity to live in dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition.<sup>15,16</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 2, Zero Hunger, emphasises the importance of sustainable and resilient food systems.<sup>17</sup>

Cities like Greater Melbourne can help catalyse many of the food solutions that can help regenerate our health and resilience. Action is needed across many issues, including regenerative farming; First Nations' leadership and aspirations; circular food economies; urban agriculture; sustainable and resilient food supply chains; locally owned or controlled businesses; equitable access to healthy, sustainable food options; recycled water access; soil carbon; food waste and nutrient recycling; food security; and land use and development.<sup>4,12,18</sup>

For example, actively supporting First Nations' biocultural and native food enterprises and practices has multiple benefits. It respects and strengthens the material and cultural health, self-determination, and resilience of First Nations peoples, helps regenerate and sustain the health of Country, strengthens economies<sup>1</sup>, and helps strengthen the health and resilience of us all.

Food gardening is also good for us. Whether in backyards, community gardens, or elsewhere, food gardening made a significant positive difference for people during lockdowns; can contribute to food security and dietary diversity for low-income households; substantially improves mental wellbeing; and has a powerful capacity to bring people together, create new friendships, and foster social connections.<sup>19</sup>

*Communities actively shape health equity, just transitions, and climate change and disaster resilience, including to pandemics.*

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## Our Response

Understanding and addressing the health impacts of climate change is an emerging focus for Victoria's health sector. Addressing the inequitable health impacts of climate change requires the concerted effort of all levels of government and collaborative cross-sector effort across health and environmental sectors.

### The Foundation's support is focused on:

- Research regarding factors threatening the health and sustainability of the food system and recommended solutions
- Capacities of First Nations' and local food enterprises
- Evidence-based pathways to an equitable, healthy, resilient, and sustainable food system.
- Demonstration projects that develop and trial new approaches to food system health, resilience, and sustainability.
- Activities that influence policy or industry to produce food system security, health, equity, and sustainability outcomes.
- Demonstration of more sustainable, equitable, and low-carbon urban agricultural approaches

### The Foundation will consider other activities that address this outcome.



# OUTCOME 3



The community services and health sectors can support community resilience to climate change and disasters.

**The World Health Organisation (W.H.O.) describes climate change as the ‘greatest challenge to human health globally’, affecting determinants of health including a healthy environment, food security, community cohesion, and housing.**

Community service and health organisations are on the frontlines of the health implications of climate change. Because they understand determinants of health and are deeply connected with the communities they serve, they are critical actors in climate resilience. Given health is influenced by so many factors that lie outside the community and health sectors, improving health equity requires collaborative, systemic action. The Foundation's support is focused on:

- Increasing the capabilities of community and health organisations to understand and respond to the health implications of climate change.
- Building community awareness and capabilities regarding climate and health to prevent and alleviate adverse health outcomes.
- Research that leads to improved policy, focusing on the population health benefits of proactive climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Innovative collaborations between community, health, and environmental organisations responding proactively to the population health implications of climate change.

## Challenge

### Climate change threatens our health

Climate change and its causes threaten the cultural, social, and ecological foundations of our health and resilience.<sup>1</sup> Often known as determinants of health, these foundations include healthy water and food; access to health and legal services; a healthy environment; participation in culture; sustainable and inclusive economics; healthy housing and urban design; employment and a sense of purpose; and community connections.<sup>2,3</sup> Climate change also impacts our psychological and social well-being via broader consequences such as political instability, reduced health system capacity, crime, and a general concern for the future.<sup>3,4</sup> Our responses to climate change (or lack thereof), also risk worsening health inequities and injustices.<sup>4,5</sup>

These impacts create flow-on pressures for health and community services.<sup>6</sup> More than half of 875 surveyed Australian health professionals reported their workplaces had already been impacted and 72 per cent said they are already seeing impacts on public health.<sup>7</sup>

Yet a recent ACROSS study found that the community sector remains underfunded, overworked, and underpaid.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the pandemic has worsened these strained capacities.<sup>9,10</sup> Community legal centres have also identified profound impacts of COVID-19 on clients and thereby workload complexity and stress.<sup>11</sup> These increasingly strained capacities across our health and community service systems mean that despite their skills and knowledge, community service and health organisations (CSHOs) are constrained in being able to connect and work with others to address climate change and health issues.<sup>12</sup>

These issues are why organisations the World Health Organisation (WHO) describes climate change as the greatest global challenge to human health, and action on climate change as a great possibility to achieve health equity.<sup>13</sup> Victoria's 2019-23 Public Health and Wellbeing Plan also identifies tackling climate change and its impacts on health as one of its four focus areas.<sup>14</sup>

### Strengthening CSHOs is central to strengthening our health and resilience

Health and resilience depend on many interrelated factors that lie outside the health sector (such as energy, environment, transport, water, justice, and urban design). So improving equity across the determinants of health requires collaborative action.<sup>15</sup> Cross-sector collaborations focused on health equity can better target the roots of health inequities that make people vulnerable to climate change and disasters in the first place.<sup>16</sup> Such collaborations can work systemically and strategically to support the multiple co-benefits of sustainable, regenerative, and healthy futures.<sup>15</sup>

CSHOs are key parts of a community's social infrastructure. They include community groups, community services, health centres, neighbourhood houses, community centres, legal services, food services, and health services.<sup>17,18</sup> Because CSHOs are deeply connected with the communities they serve, they understand the root causes of health inequities and disproportionate vulnerabilities to climate change.<sup>19</sup> Their expertise and experiences make CSHOs central to collaborative work on equitable health and climate resilience.

However, without good preparation and strategic planning, CSHOs can, themselves, be highly vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather events.<sup>20</sup> They need to capabilities in identifying and managing the risks climate change poses to the organisation's staff and service delivery capacities, as well as in adapting services to meet the climate change related needs of the communities they serve.<sup>21,22</sup>

Given all of this, community health and climate resilience depend on CSHO capacities and capabilities in climate change resilience. This includes the resilience of the individuals, their organisations, and the communities with whom they work, reducing their organisational emissions, and their participation in relevant decision and policy making.

## Our Response

The community service and health sectors have shown great adaptability and ingenuity in responding to the demands of the pandemic while trying to maintain services where they could. Yet they remain under pressure and climate change will exacerbate this pressure.<sup>8</sup>

There is a clear need to increase the capacities (resources and people) and strengthen the capabilities (skills, leadership, and knowledge) of CSHOs to build their own resilience, support the communities with whom they work, and to participate in decision and policy making that influence all these issues.

### The Foundation's support is focused on:

- increasing the capacities and capabilities of CSHOs to:
  - plan for and respond to the health implications of climate change
  - collaborate with communities in climate change resilience efforts
  - strengthen community cohesion and climate justice
- Research or demonstration projects that leads to improved policy, focusing on the population health benefits of proactive climate change adaptation and mitigation, including reducing emissions.
- Innovative collaborations between CSHOs and environmental organisations proactively addressing population health implications of climate change.

### The Foundation will consider other activities that address this outcome.

## OUTCOME 1

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**Learn more about the issues affecting our community**

Our [Greater Melbourne Vital Signs Report](#) provides a snapshot of the health, wellbeing and vitality of Greater Melbourne. The report identifies positive aspects of our community, as well as the issues we face, and informs the Foundation's strategy.