

HEALTHY & RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



Increasing community resilience to withstand major social and health challenges.

OUTCOME 1	OUTCOME 2	OUTCOME 3
Increased cross-sector collaborations, strengthening community resilience to extreme weather and disasters.	Increased capacity of health organisations to respond to the health impacts of climate change.	Reduced discrimination and inequality that undermine resilience.

To access in-depth information about the other outcomes in the Healthy & Resilient Communities Impact Area, visit lmcf.org.au/our-impact/healthy-resilient-communities

Challenge

The changing climate is affecting health.

The World Health Organisation describes climate change as the greatest challenge to human health globally.¹ The most pervasive health impacts are due to high levels of pollution, primarily caused by fossil fuel combustion, more frequent extreme weather events and disasters, threats to safe drinking water and food security, an increased spread of mosquito-borne diseases and the increasing negative impact on mental health.² The Paris Agreement stipulates that climate change undermines the social and environmental determinants of health and exacerbates health inequities.³ Climate change mitigation is the most critical intervention to prevent these health impacts.⁴ Additionally, investment in adaptation work that creates informed and resilient health systems that can respond to the human health impacts of climate change is vital.⁵

Certain groups of people are disproportionately affected by these health impacts.

In a local context, Victoria is particularly vulnerable to health impacts of climate change and our health sector is already responding to the health issues that are exacerbated by or resulting from this issue. Heatwaves in Victoria have resulted in hundreds of deaths - more than any other extreme weather event.⁶ Disasters such as bushfires, floods and drought contribute to acute and chronic health issues for the communities affected. Other health risks include the increase in cases of Ross River virus and unpredictable weather events such as the 2016 thunderstorm asthma emergency.⁷ As with other population health issues, the health impacts of climate change are disproportionately affecting communities with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage and higher rates of non-communicable diseases.⁸ The intersection of these issues reinforces the need for climate change must be responded to as a health equity issue.

The Victorian Government's Climate Change Framework (a long-term plan to 2050) includes the development of an Adaptation Action Plan for the health and human

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services sector to reduce vulnerability to climate change health risks, as well as to build knowledge of these risks.

The Framework applies an equity lens to addressing the health and wellbeing impacts of climate change and acknowledges the challenge that more frequent and intense extreme weather will have likely downstream effects upon the social determinants of health and wellbeing such as housing, urban liveability, food security and employment.⁹ Sustainability Victoria has recently focused their communications on the health impacts associated with climate change to signal the personal relevance of climate change and therefore greater respect for the urgency of mitigating climate change.¹⁰

Increasing awareness and understanding of the health impacts of climate change remains an area that requires significant effort from all levels of government, health organisations and professional bodies, and the broader community. Health professionals and organisations are at the 'front-line' of witnessing the health impacts of climate change and consequent exacerbation of health inequities¹¹ and are therefore critical actors in driving climate change mitigation and adaptation within the community.¹²

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:

- **Increasing the capacity of health organisations to understand and respond to the health impacts 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 climate change action and responding to the existing health risks of climate change.**
- **Innovative collaborations between health and environmental organisations responding proactively to the population health effects of climate change.**

The Foundation will consider other activities that address this outcome.

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Endnotes

- ¹ World Health Organisation, COP24 Special Report Health and Climate Change (2018), <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/276405/9789241514972-eng.pdf?ua=1>
- ² *ibid.*
- ³ *ibid.*
- ⁴ Costello A, Abbas M, Allen A, Ball S, Bell S, Bellamy R, The Lancet, *Managing the health effects of climate change* (2009).
- ⁵ World Health Organisation, COP24 Special Report Health and Climate Change (2018), <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/276405/9789241514972-eng.pdf?ua=1>
- ⁶ Climate and Health Alliance, *Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia* (2017).
- ⁷ Beggs PJ & Zhang Y, Medical Journal of Australia, *The MJA–Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: Australian policy inaction threatens lives*, (2018), <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2018/209/11/mja-lancet-countdown-health-and-climate-change-australian-policy-inaction-0>
- ⁸ Climate and Health Alliance, *Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Well-being for Australia* (2017).
- ⁹ DEWLP, Victoria's Climate Change Framework, https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/55254/DELWPClimateChange_Framework.pdf, p 29.
- ¹⁰ Sustainability Victoria, *Climate Change and Health – do people understand the link?* (2019)
- ¹¹ Sweet M, The Guardian, *Inequality and climate change: the perfect storm threatening the health of Australia's poorest* (2019). <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/may/14/inequality-and-climate-change-the-perfect-storm-threatening-the-health-of-australias-poorest>
- ¹² World Health Organisation, COP24 Special Report Health and Climate Change (2018), <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/276405/9789241514972-eng.pdf?ua=1>