



# Public health planning and climate change

## Communication, engagement and capacity building

Local governments play an important role in supporting community and organisational action on climate change. This includes communicating about climate and health risk, engaging with communities to identify priorities and co-design solutions, and building internal and external capacity to implement public health and climate resilient strategies.

**Communication:** Misinformation and disinformation about climate change and its causes and impacts can be shared through social media can have very real consequences for the health and wellbeing of communities, particularly during times of crisis. Local governments play an important role in regularly sharing accurate information about climate change and public health.

**Community engagement:** Local governments are important local partners in facilitating effective individual and organisational activities to reduce emissions and protect public health from the impacts of climate change. Community engagement helps to identify local climate-health priorities, co-design actions, and monitor progress. Community engagement strengthens rationale for strategies and actions and promotes community ownership. Through co-designing programs with diverse community members including those at risk<sup>1</sup>, local governments can ensure these activities are appropriate and responsive to the whole community and that people in their communities are not disproportionately impacted.

**Capacity building:** Community engagement to develop and implement plans and programs is important to facilitate a broad base of residents and local government staff with increased skills and knowledge relating to climate and health. Local governments could consider partnering with state agencies, non-government organisations, researchers, or community groups who work at the intersection of community and social development, public health and climate change or natural disasters to assist in local capacity building.

By enabling broad and deep community input, mutual opportunities can be created for local governments and community members to:

- Develop an understanding of local risks, strengths, capabilities, and assets to reduce risk and improve resilience.
- Inform locally led and relevant actions to address identified risks.
- Empower communities to lead, plan, and implement initiatives that meet the needs of all members of the community.
- Foster more socially connected or networked communities, enabling better outcomes before, during and after disasters.
- Organise rapid disaster responses which minimise social and health impacts.
- Build community support for emission reduction and broader climate programs.

<sup>1</sup> As defined in the introductory factsheet

Through collective community effort, local governments can foster a sense of hope, connectedness, optimism, and resilience. Collective action can minimise the feeling isolation or the perception of having a lack of skills or ability to address climate change. The [Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) recognises that effective and participatory governance (where the community has a voice), social trust and trust in government institutions, equity across society, wellbeing, and climate mitigation are all linked and can positively reinforce each other.

Example strategies that could be implemented are included in the table below:

Examples
Engage, empower, and facilitate programs that assist communities to organise, prepare for, adapt to and mitigate the negative effects of a changing climate. This includes raising awareness about climate change and its impacts on health and promoting actions that can be taken to collectively address climate change and support communities to stay healthy and connected in a changing climate.
Develop and enable community-led capacity building and education programs on climate change and health adaptation and resilience.
Engage with the community, especially those more vulnerable to impacts, to understand their needs and priorities, experiences, and knowledge of barriers in current systems.
Engage with and learn from Aboriginal Elders and community members about impacts they may be observing and suggestions for responses that care for both Country and people.
Support trusted community leaders to collaborate with culturally and linguistically diverse community members, or those that may be more vulnerable to climate change impacts.
Ensure information and engagement processes are accessible and culturally safe and responsive. Consider providing programs and services where people already meet in ways that work for them. Examples include in-person events in community venues; physical materials available for those who do not have digital access or digital literacy; online access for events for those who cannot travel; free training and if needed creche facilities to enable carers to participate; community transport for those who need it to attend events or participate in governance or planning activities; venue accessibility for those who have mobility difficulties
Consider investing in partnerships and programs with existing community organisations or groups that are already known to and trusted by the community, or that are already engaging with communities around climate adaptation, resilience, and capacity building

This document has been adapted from [Tackling climate change and its impacts on health through municipal public health and wellbeing planning - Guidance for local government, 2024](#), Department of Health, Victoria.

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