



Public health planning and climate change

Leadership and governance

Addressing climate change and the associated public health impacts will require coordinated efforts and a whole of local government approach. Strong leadership and governance are essential.

Leadership is needed to deepen local understanding of the associations between climate change and health outcomes. Local governments can better develop plans that consider climate risks and reduce the community's vulnerability to these risks when leadership and governance processes are inclusive of all people within our communities, including Aboriginal people, the elderly, people living with disability, young people, people in poverty, and people who are isolated and or marginalised. Climate impacts and the threats to health are higher when there is conflict within the community and/or people are excluded, isolated and not having their basic needs met. Acknowledging and enabling leadership from these groups will minimise the adverse health impacts of climate change for these groups and provide significant benefits for the broader population.

Local governments are uniquely positioned to support their communities in understanding climate risk, and to identify and support communities that are experiencing greater climate vulnerability. They have access to local environmental data, can draw on existing or new partnerships with other governmental and nongovernmental organisations, and have legal powers to protect and promote public health and influence the social and environmental drivers of health. Local governments are also a source of trusted information and the first 'port of call' for their residents if things go wrong or there are significant events.

Local governments are also a trusted source of information and guidance for community members, businesses, and industry and have a role in communicating appropriate and timely information on health risks and adaptation actions and activities to their communities.

Equally important is local government demonstrating leadership and public commitment to tackling climate change and its impacts on health by acting within their own organisation.

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

Examples
<p>Address climate change and its impacts on health within the community through a strategic approach at multiple levels of decision making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrate climate change and health actions across all relevant organisational policies, plans, and strategies, including public health and corporate planning.• Implement a whole-of-council approach for joint ownership and management of issues.• Include climate change and its impacts on health in the organisation's risk management activities including risk registers, risk reviews, and business continuity planning.

Develop collaborative governance mechanisms that support climate change and sustainability action, climate-resilience and public health. This could include:

- Ensuring representation from diverse communities in formal governance structures.
- Establishing working groups of community members from different backgrounds (including those most impacted by climate risk) to support the development and implementation of public health plans.
- Participation in regional alliances and communities of practice that facilitate local and regional action and knowledge sharing in relation to climate change, public health and community resilience.
- Integration of other regional and strategic planning forums and initiatives that could contribute to or assist with public health plan development and implementation.

Embed adaptation approaches across all local government works and policies:

- Update the local government's business continuity plan and emergency management programs to consider the impact of extreme weather events and local climate risks.
- Embed local climate projections into the design, build, and management of local government infrastructure and assets.
- Include consideration of thermal comfort, urban heat island effect, green and blue infrastructure protection, connectivity, transport, and community concerns in local planning and development policies.

Celebrate and support sustainable and climate resilient activities in the community through awards, grants, or other methods:

- Develop fact sheets and information sharing forums on health impacts of climate change and responses needed.
- Consider electrification or thermal improvement grants for households and community members.
- Establish sustainability or emission reduction activities in streets or community groups.

Develop and implement strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by local government and improve sustainability:

- Reduce electricity consumption and transition to renewable energy supply.
- Improve building design and implement energy efficiency upgrades.
- Upgrade public lighting to energy-efficient technology.
- Facilitate reductions in transport emissions by staff via flexible work from home arrangements, public and active transport support, and a transition to electric fleet vehicles.
- Improve, expand, and regenerate green and blue infrastructure across local government land and assets to decrease heat-island effects.

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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