



Public health planning and climate change

Mental health and wellbeing

The impacts of climate change on mental health and wellbeing are already being experienced and are expected to increase with forecast climate changes. The mental health of those in our communities can be affected directly by experience of extreme weather events such as heatwaves, bushfires, flooding, and droughts, or indirectly via exposure to worsening environmental, economic or social conditions resulting from a changing climate. The range of mental health impacts includes diverse expressions of psychological distress, exacerbation of existing mental health conditions, and specific climate or ecological anxiety.

The [State Public Health Plan for Western Australia 2025-2030](#), in addition to addressing climate change, includes an explicit priority relating to mental health and wellbeing. Ensuring high mental health and wellbeing enables individuals to actively participate in community and family life, contribute socially and economically, and experience meaningful lives. Low levels of mental health and wellbeing are linked to mental and physical ill-health, harmful alcohol and other drug use, and lower quality of life.

Local governments, as providers of local programs and facilities, are well placed to support the mental health and wellbeing of the community. They can support community members during times of crisis through promoting existing mental health and wellbeing services and guiding the delivery and coordination of broader underlying supports such as financial assistance and housing.

Local government is also well placed to improve community mental wellbeing outside of the immediate response to emergencies via two key approaches: enhancing protective factors that promote higher levels of mental wellbeing, such as social connection and access to supportive environments, and reducing risk factors that contribute to poor mental health outcomes, including social isolation and poor emergency preparedness. Local governments can support increased resilience through ensuring the community is socially connected and inclusive; more socially connected communities fare better during natural disaster events. Engaging with the community to prepare for expected extreme weather events is also a practical approach to reducing both physical and mental health risks.

Although climate change poses a risk to mental health, tackling climate change presents an opportunity to shape future mental health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Through collective community effort to prepare for climate impacts and address greenhouse gas emissions, local governments can foster a sense of hope, connectedness, optimism, and resilience in their communities. This collective action can minimise the feeling of being powerless or the perception of having a lack of skills or ability to address climate change; all of which are associated with 'eco-anxiety'. 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.

Some measures to tackle climate change can also have important direct mental health co-benefits, including improving access to natural environments, better air quality via transition to renewable energy, and increasing the availability of “active” transport options (walking and cycling in combination with public transport). Secondary benefits to mental health and wellbeing can be seen in activities such as investing in local circular economies and local supply chains, both of which can improve employment opportunities, with subsequent impacts on social and emotional wellbeing.

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

Examples
Encourage and facilitate conversations about climate change and mental health across all levels of local government including leadership and executive teams, elected councillors, and community engagement officers. Include what proactive action are being taken locally and what actions could be taken to address climate change and its impacts on health; consider actions that prepare for climate impacts, build community connection and resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
Encourage and facilitate conversations about climate change and mental health with the community, especially with children and youth and other at-risk groups.
Encourage and promote community programs and spaces to increase connection with nature (e.g. local land care or ‘friends of’ groups, inter-generational playgroups, community gardens, outdoor recreation activities and green spaces). This can increase social connections and provide direct mental health benefits associated with being in natural environments.
Encourage and promote programs and opportunities for social connection, building resilient communities with strong networks and equitable social capital. This assists all residents to have equal opportunities to build connections, participate in community life, and benefit from social opportunities and networks, regardless of their background.
Support and promote mental health services for people who may be affected by extreme weather events such as heatwaves, drought, bushfires or floods. This could include partnering with regional groups and other local governments.
Partner with the local Health Service Provider, community health networks, or Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, and not-for-profit organisations to identify and support mental health service needs in the community.

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.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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