

Summary: Tackling climate change and its impacts on health through municipal public health and wellbeing planning

Guidance for local government 2024

'The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future.'^{1p3}

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

The earth is warming at an unprecedented rate because of increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Victoria's climate has changed over recent decades, becoming hotter and drier, and these trends are projected to continue. Victoria is already seeing direct and indirect health and wellbeing impacts associated with events such as floods, fires and heatwaves, which are occurring with greater frequency and intensity due to climate change. Many impacts of climate change pose multiple threats to health and wellbeing and can occur at the same time, resulting in cascading or compounding impacts.² Ambitious action to mitigate climate change is critical to lessening the impacts, and adaptation action must occur at the same time because a certain amount of climate change is locked in due to greenhouse gas emissions already trapped in the atmosphere.

A threat and an opportunity

Climate change has been described as the greatest threat to public health of the 21st century.³ At the same time, tackling climate change has been described as the greatest global health opportunity.³ Addressing the threat and realising the opportunity to improve health requires global action at all levels and will only be achieved in close collaboration with the community. Victorian councils are already taking significant action to tackle climate change and its impacts on health. This includes delivering initiatives within Victorian communities that are both health-promoting and emissions-reducing, such as those focused on increasing active transport and increasing healthy eating. However, efforts need to occur at a pace and scale that ensures climate change impacts remain within adaptive capacity limits of health and health-supporting systems.⁴

Local government is identified in the *Climate Change Act 2017* as a decision-maker that must consider climate change when preparing a municipal public health and wellbeing plan (MPHWP). Tackling climate change and its impacts on health is also one of ten priority areas in the Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2023–2027 and, under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, councils are required to have regard to the state plan when preparing a MPHWP. The purpose of the *Tackling climate change and its impacts on health through municipal public health and wellbeing planning: guidance for local government, 2024* (the guidance) is to assist councils in meeting these legislative obligations.

The guidance builds on the department’s previous guidance and supplements existing guidance on municipal public health and wellbeing planning by providing information on how climate change can be incorporated in each stage of the planning cycle. It draws on the current scientific understanding of climate change and its impacts on health and councils’ experiences to date. The guidance seeks to encourage and accelerate action to tackle climate change and its impacts on health. It recognises the important role that councils play and includes a range of strategies and council case studies to support and inspire action.

Key concepts

‘Climate change is a multiplier of existing health vulnerabilities...the most effective measures to reduce vulnerability in the near term are programmes that implement and improve basic public health’^{2p048}

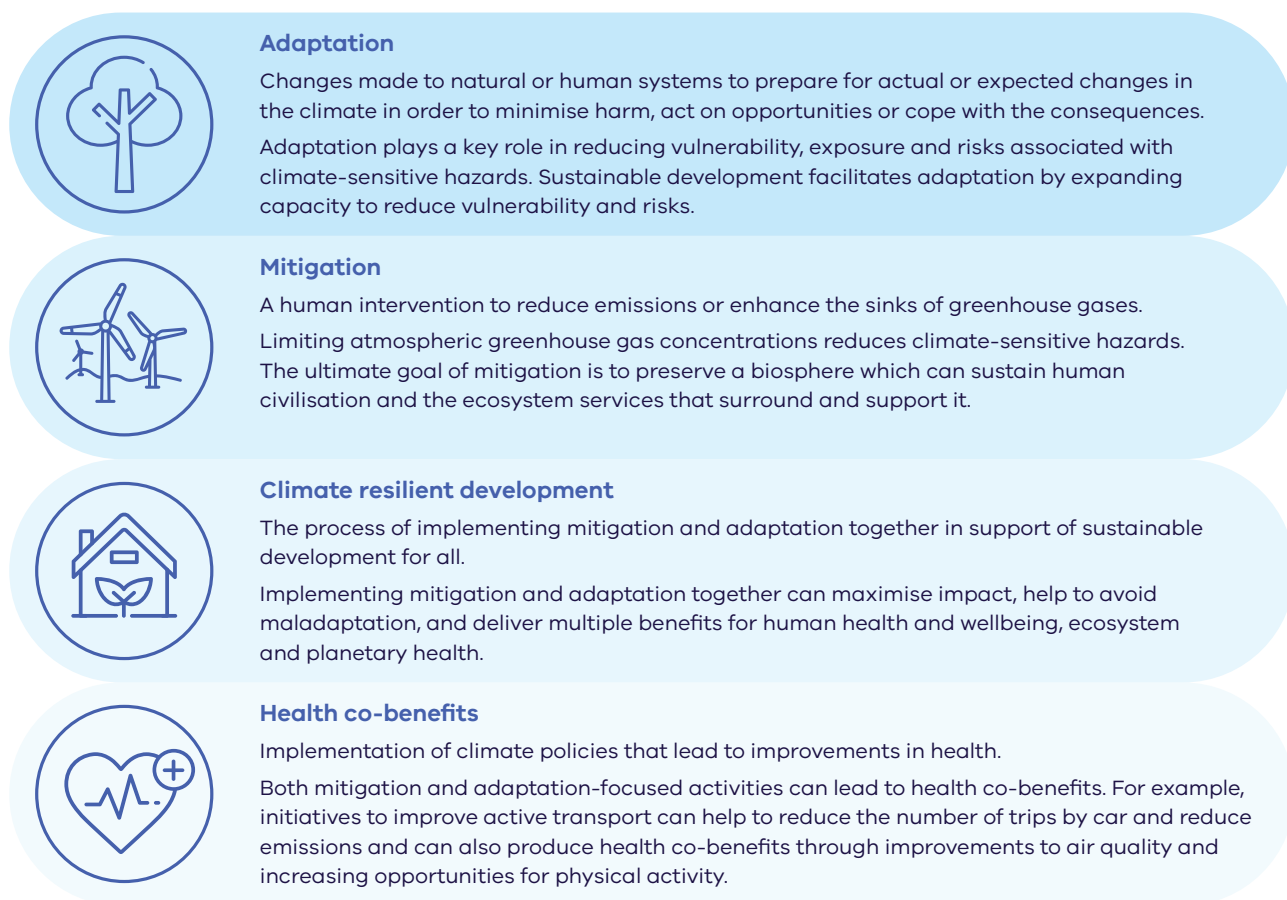
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The **vulnerability** of populations exposed to a climate hazard is informed by two main factors:

- **sensitivity** – the degree to which populations are affected by climate variability or change²
- **adaptive capacity** – the capability of populations to adjust to change, to minimise harm, to act on opportunities or to cope with the consequences.⁵

Figure 1 provides an overview of other key concepts, including adaptation, mitigation, climate resilient development, and the health co-benefits of climate action.

Figure 1: Key concepts: adaptation, mitigation, climate resilient development and health co-benefits^{6–9}



Key principles and enablers

In seeking to tackle climate change and its impacts on health in a wholistic way, local government could consider the principles and enablers outlined in **figure 2**.

Figure 2: Key principles and enablers^{2,10-14}

Principles

Equity and climate justice

Climate justice links development and human rights to achieve a human-centred approach to addressing climate change, and generally includes three principles:

- **distributive justice** – the allocation of burdens and benefits among individuals, nations and generations
- **procedural justice** – who decides and participates in decision-making
- **recognition** – entails basic respect and robust engagement with, and fair consideration of, diverse cultures and perspectives.

Valuing Indigenous knowledge systems is a key component of climate justice. In choosing and implementing climate actions, include a key focus on the principles of climate justice, to ensure that solutions are just, and that they distribute benefits, burdens and risks equitably.

Systems thinking, systems transformation and collaboration

Addressing the complex, compound and cascading risks resulting from climate change requires system and societal transformations and multisectoral collaborations. In pursuing the system transformations required to tackle climate change and its impacts on health, apply systems thinking and methods to better understand challenges and opportunities, and to identify collective actions. Remove siloed ways of working, create multidisciplinary teams and expand partnerships within and outside local government. Join or form peak bodies, associations, alliances and collaborative partnerships to leverage knowledge and resources, and deliver integrated and ambitious action.

One health and planetary health

‘One health’ is defined by the World Health Organization as ‘an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimise the health of people, animals and ecosystems.’ It is closely related to ‘planetary health’, which is defined by the Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health as ‘the health of human civilisation and the state of the natural systems on which it depends.’ For societies to achieve planetary health, ambitious, integrated policies need to be developed and implemented to address the social, environmental and economic determinants of health. In taking action to tackle climate change and its impacts on health through municipal public health and wellbeing planning, consider the broader context of planetary health and one health, and integrated approaches to addressing risks and impacts.

Enablers

Leadership, governance, knowledge and capacity, and finance

Multi-level leadership, governance, knowledge and capacity, and financial resources are key enablers to ensuring that communities are less exposed to climate-related hazards and contribute less to global warming. They are also key to enabling ‘climate mainstreaming’. Climate mainstreaming is where climate change considerations are integrated into processes, policies, decisions, and other activities, to support strategic objectives of emissions reduction and adaptation. It also concerns actions and decisions for which a failure to integrate climate change considerations can work against the realisation of climate adaptation and mitigation goals.

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