



Public health planning and climate change

Emergency management

The impacts of climate change on health should be considered in all aspects of local government emergency management planning. Local governments play a critical role in prevention, preparation, response, and recovery from impacts associated with emergencies such as heatwaves, fires, floods, and storms (Figure 1). This role is likely to increase due to the expected increasing severity, frequency, or duration of extreme weather events. This factsheet focuses on the preparedness and response phases of emergency management; prevention and recovery activities are covered in other factsheets.

Heatwaves are an under-recognised threat to the health of the community. Western Australia (WA) already sees an increase in deaths and hospital presentations during periods of high heat, predominantly due to exacerbations of existing illness. The Department of Health is the State Hazard Management Agency for Heatwave. Local governments have an important role to play in reducing exposure of residents to high temperatures during extreme heat events. The [State Hazard Plan for Heatwave](#) provides detail of arrangements for the management of heatwave in WA and contains information on heatwave prevention, preparedness, response and initial recovery.

At risk populations¹ are more likely to be exposed to disasters and suffer greater health impacts due to existing health disparities, economic strain, and barriers to accessing services. Important examples include difficulty with evacuation or accessing essential healthcare services, food, and medications. It is vital to ensure effort is put into building and strengthening trusted relationships with at risk groups well ahead of emergencies. This enables development of an understanding of impacts and co-design of fit-for-purpose emergency plans. Injuries during the response and recovery phases are commonplace, as well as risks to food and water quality and security and increased skin and gastrointestinal infections and vector-borne diseases. Family and domestic violence, and mental health issues, can increase following disasters.

Activities that improve the outcomes for local communities require consideration across multiple sectors to reduce duplication, optimise outcomes, and ensure that local climate-health and emergency management requirements are met. Local government engagement with other relevant organisations including state government and community organisations is critical.



Figure 1: Four phases of emergency management (Source: [State Emergency Management Committee](#)).

¹ 'At risk populations' is defined in the introductory factsheet.

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

Examples
Ensure new and revised emergency management, fire management, and heatwave plans consider projected changes in WA’s climate and climate-related health risks. This can include impacts on assets and on the provision of essential health and community services.
Create educational opportunities for local government staff and council to understand the links between health and climate change, and emergency management. This could include the health implications of disruptions in communications and energy systems (such as supply of cool living spaces, safe water, food, clothing, medicines, and first aid).
Establish strong governance and communication networks for emergency management between local government, relevant agencies, and community organisations, and improve communication prior, during and after disaster events.
Engage with at risk populations and communities, such as through advisory groups or committees, to support the co-design of emergency management plans and information materials that address the needs of these populations. Considerations could include alternative messaging formats, advanced or tailored warnings for evacuation, travel assistance for evacuation, accessible evacuation points with additional trained staffing supports for those with health or disability requirements.
Plan for and invest in cool spaces with ‘clean’ air to provide community respite during periods of extreme heat or when local air quality becomes heavily impacted by bushfire smoke.
Raise awareness through community engagement, including community workshops, on the projected impacts of climate change and prevention and mitigation actions. Both individual and community actions should be considered. Consider partnering with other agencies, community groups or local State Emergency Service volunteers to assist in supporting these education and engagement processes.
Include considerations of local health professionals such as general practitioners and community health services in emergency management planning, including arrangements for response and recovery activities.
Support initiatives that build community networks, which can be important in developing community resilience and better disaster response.
Utilise grant funding opportunities for emergency management programs preventing the public health impacts of extreme events and disasters.
Through partnerships develop or enable programs (including prevention activities) to assist individuals or families who may be at increased risk of family violence, abuse or displacement during and after emergencies and disasters.

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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