



Public health planning and climate change

Environmental health

Local governments can incorporate consideration of climate change into environmental health management and public health planning.

Environmental health staff in local government are already responding to public health impacts of climate change in their day-to-day work. Examples include responding to increases in blue-green algal blooms, due to lower water levels and increased temperatures, in recreational water bodies managed by local government, cryptosporidium outbreaks in public aquatic facilities associated with increased patronage during heatwaves, mosquito management and mosquito-borne diseases particularly following flooding events, and food-borne disease outbreaks related to climate-sensitive organisms. Climate change is expected to increase the demand on environmental health officers (EHOs) in local government in response to changes in air, water and food quality, vector distribution and other environmental hazards which impact on public health.

Environmental health services are key to emergency management preparedness, response and recovery particularly as natural disaster events such as bushfires and floods become more frequent and intense due to climate change. Following bushfires or floods, this role typically includes:

- Impact assessments for damaged properties (including assessment of onsite wastewater systems and drinking water supplies, and for other risks including asbestos and mould).
- Assessment of risks to and from temporary accommodation and regulated premises such as food businesses.
- Health protection services at relief and recovery centres, including provision of public health information, food safety assessment of donated foods and food prepared on site, and investigation and supervision of control measures for gastrointestinal disease outbreaks.
- Increased provision of localised public health advice related to private drinking water. contamination, loss of refrigeration due to power outages (impacting food safety for homes and businesses), and mosquito-borne disease prevention; alongside enhanced mosquito surveillance and mitigation efforts.

There is an increasing recognition that the knowledge and skills of EHOs can inform climate change adaptation planning by local governments. EHOs are experts in risk assessment and risk management and can play a key role in preventative health strategies and public health planning.

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

Examples
Consider how climate change will affect environmental health teams and services (including the delivery of surveillance, regulatory, and emergency management functions).
Ensure climate change and its impacts on health are considered in relevant environmental health policies and plans e.g. provision for enhanced inspection and surveillance activities during higher risk periods.
Ensure EHOs are included in formal governance and planning processes regarding public health planning, climate change mitigation, climate change and health risk, and adaptation assessments.
Enable community members with diverse experiences to share their experiences relating to environmental health and climate change with EHO staff. Examples include intersections with housing, water and food supply and safety, air quality, and others.
Support community engagement activities to raise awareness about potential impacts of climate change on public health in the municipality and what actions can be taken to improve business and residential preparedness and resilience.
Facilitate opportunities for EHOs to engage with local government climate change planning processes, including climate change and health risk assessments and public health plans.

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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