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Health and human services climate change adaptation action plan 2022-2026

To respond to the current and future risks of climate change, the Department of Health and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has developed a consultation draft [Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-2026](#) (the draft Plan). The draft Plan proposes 14 strategic actions across three key focus areas:

- public and stakeholder engagement on climate resilience and health
- infrastructure resilience
- sector capability.

The draft Plan is intended to guide climate adaptation response across the health and human services sector, proposing short-, medium- and long-term objectives to address climate change impacts.

The department's ['At a glance' document](#) provides an overview of the potential impacts and opportunities of climate change on health and human services in Victoria, current adaptation actions and proposed actions.

Climate change and its impact on public health services

Climate change has been described by the World Health Organization as the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. As a nation we are already seeing the impacts of climate change as Australia becomes hotter and drier¹, resulting in increased climate related risks. Key climate risks are region-specific, but generally for Victoria include:

- more days of extreme heat
- harsher fire weather
- less rainfall
- more frequent and intense downpours
- rising sea levels.

These impacts are already being seen broadly across the state and projections for Victoria indicate this trend will continue. By the 2050s, if the current global warming rate continues, Victorian towns could experience around double the number of very hot days each year compared to the 1986–2005 average².

The effects of climate change are impacting Victoria's public health systems and will continue to have direct implications for services.

Potential impacts for health services include:

- increased stress on health and emergency services
- more heat-related death, particularly among the elderly and disadvantaged
- mental health effects
- changes in disease occurrence.

Decisive action to adapt now will reduce current and future risks, build social and economic resilience, and ensure Victoria is best placed to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

¹ Victoria Climate Science Report, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0029/442964/Victorias-Climate-Science-Report-2019.pdf

² Department of Land, Water and Planning. *Victorian Climate Science Report*. https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0029/442964/Victorias-Climate-Science-Report-2019.pdf

What is the difference between climate change mitigation and adaptation?

Climate change adaptation means anticipating the effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to adapt to, prevent or minimise the damage they can cause or taking advantage of opportunities that may arise. Adaptation can be understood as the process of adjusting to the current and future effects of climate change.

Climate change mitigation refers to action taken to reduce the severity of the impacts of climate change by preventing or reducing the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) into the atmosphere. In short, mitigation is a human intervention that reduces the sources of GHG emissions, through for example energy efficiency, or renewable energy, and/or enhances the GHG sinks, such as forests.

Further information on what Government and the Department of Health is doing on climate change mitigation in government operations, including public hospitals, is available at:

- <https://www.vhba.vic.gov.au/health/sustainability>
- <https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/victorian-government-action-on-climate-change/Whole-of-Victorian-Government-sector-pledge-accessible.pdf>

Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-2026

Over the next five years, the plan aims to address current climate change impacts, reduce barriers to adaptation planning and action, and lay the foundations for transformational adaptation. Actions in the draft Plan will be led by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

Details of the action areas can be found in the table below.

Public and stakeholder engagement on climate resilience and health	Infrastructure resilience	Sector capability
1. Engage the profile and leadership of the Chief Health Officer	3. Actively manage climate hazards across the social housing asset base	10. Demonstrate organisational leadership
2. Improve the evidence base and monitoring of climate-related health impacts now and in the future	4. Transform the current social housing asset base	11. Leverage the Health and Human Services' delivery footprint
	5. Embed climate resilience in new social housing developments	12. Support embedding of place-based adaptation in whole-of-Victorian-Government effort.
	2. Transform the health asset base	13. Embed Aboriginal self-determination in our approach to climate change adaptation
	3. Explore options to manage the impact of an urban heat island on health infrastructure and services	14. Develop mental health support tailored to climate change impacts
	4. Explore options to secure climate-resilient health infrastructure	
	5. Promote cross-portfolio consistency	

What does this mean for health services?

The proposed actions in the draft Plan are designed to be implemented by the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing at the system level. There are a number of actions in the Plan that provide opportunities for health and human services to deliver adaptation action or support adaptation through the health services provided to the community. Some areas of the draft Plan that relate to health services include supporting place-based climate change adaptation action, provision of climate change mental health support, adapting health infrastructure and addressing the impacts of climate change at a health governance level. The proposed actions are at a strategic level, but the consultation period provides an opportunity for the health and human services sector to provide feedback and advice on the implementation of the draft Plan and proposed actions, and on how the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing can support and enhance sector capability.

The Department also proposes to leverage sector-wide climate change adaptation and risk management support through requiring responses to climate change risks in larger funded organisations, all independent agencies, statutory authorities and advisory bodies.

Next steps

The VHA is working with the Department of Health and the Victorian Health Building Authority to provide the health sector an overview of climate change and its impacts on the public health system, climate change adaptation, and the opportunity to comment on the proposed actions in the draft Plan.

The VHA will be collating sector-wide feedback on the draft Plan to inform a submission to the department.



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