

2 August 2021

## Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2021-2026

### Executive summary

On Wednesday 28 July 2021, the VHA delivered a two-hour, virtual consultation forum for members from Victoria's public health services sector. The purpose of the forum was to capture feedback on the [Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-2026](#) (the CCAAP). There were 35 attendees, representing a mix of hospitals, community health, emergency, dental and small rural health services.

This report is designed to complement the department's consultation through Engage Victoria and will be submitted to the department and shared with VHA forum attendees.

The consultation, which involved live polling, a presentation from the Department of Health (the department) and a breakout room discussion, demonstrated the eagerness of the sector to be supported to deliver climate adaptation. Participants identified key themes to be considered for inclusion in the CCAAP. Themes included the expansion of the CCAAP to reflect the entire public health service system, a coordinated approach that builds on existing systems, and provision of appropriate resources to support implementation.

Discussion at the consultation identified strong agreement across attendees for seven key opportunities to strengthen the CCAAP.

#### Opportunities:

1. The CCAAP should reflect the whole of Victoria's public health service system.
2. Implementation of the CCAAP should take a coordinated approach across the public health service system.
3. The CCAAP should apply a strong rural and regional lens across all action areas.
4. The CCAAP implementation should be supported by appropriate settings-specific resourcing, guidance and tools.
5. The CCAAP should be delivered alongside state-wide sector support focusing on building the capacity of public health service system.
6. The department should provide clarification on the implementation of the CCAAP and expectations of health services.
7. The CCAAP should leverage the strengths of the public health service system to embed climate change adaptation.

### About the Victorian Healthcare Association

The Victorian Healthcare Association is the peak body supporting Victoria's public health services to deliver high-quality care. Established in 1938, the VHA represents Victoria's diverse public healthcare sector, including public hospitals, aged care and community health services.

As well as providing a unified voice for the sector, the VHA delivers value for its members by offering tailored professional development programs, networking opportunities, and informative events. The VHA advocates on behalf of its members on sector-critical issues by engaging and influencing key decision-makers involved in policy development and system reform.

### Background

On Wednesday 28 July 2021, the VHA delivered a two-hour, virtual consultation forum for members from Victoria's public health services sector. The purpose of the forum was to capture feedback on the [Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-2026](#) (the HHS CCAAP).

There were 35 attendees present, representing a mix of hospitals, community health, emergency, dental and small rural health services (see attachment 1: list of organisations in attendance). The VHA extended the invite to non-member organisations as there was particular interest from Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs). The attendees represented a mix of perspectives, demonstrating the broad impacts climate change has on service delivery systems and the diverse allocation of resources.

The HHS CCAAP is a key deliverable for the Department of Health and the Department of Family, Fairness and Housing. The HHS CCAAP is one of seven system-level climate adaptation plans coordinated by the Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning (DEWLP). The HHS CCAAP proposes 14 strategic actions across three key focus areas:

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

The HHS CCAAP 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 and leverage sector support.

### The sector forum: method

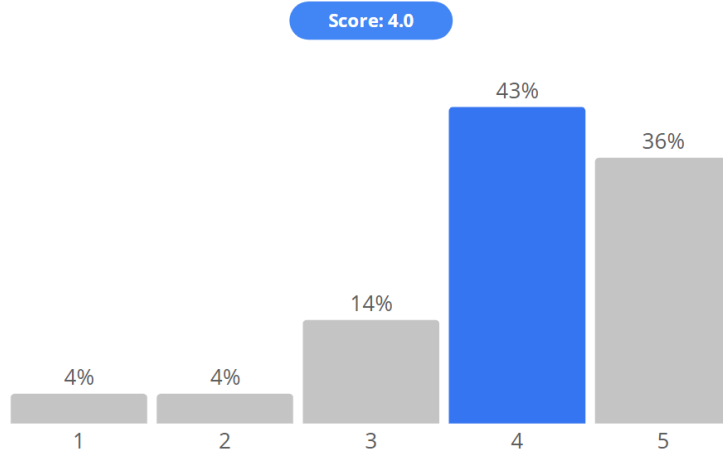
To ensure participants had sufficient time to review and consider the HHS CCAAP, the VHA collaborated with the department to develop a [Member briefing](#) that outlined key elements of the HHS CCAAP for the sector. This was shared with participants prior to the forum.

The forum began with a sentiment analysis to gauge attitudes and organisational responses to climate change. Feedback was captured using the virtual engagement tool Slido. Participants were asked three questions:

1. How concerned are you about the impacts of climate change on your organisation?
2. Does climate change feature in your organisation's strategic planning?
3. Have you previously raised the issue of climate change adaptation in your organisation?
  - a. If yes, what response did you get?

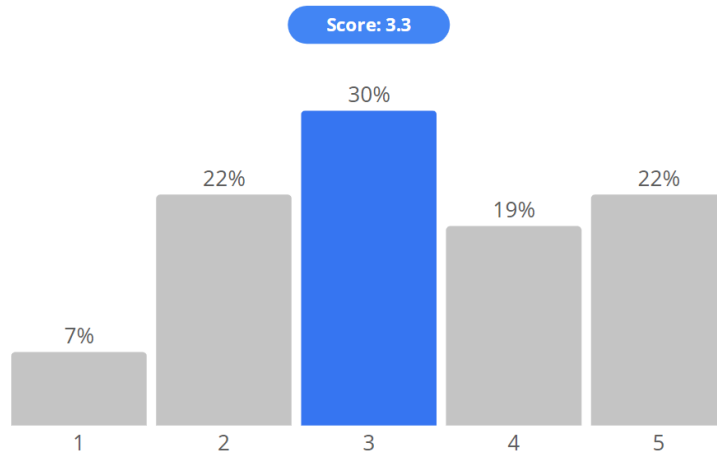
Responses to these questions are captured in the visuals below.

**Q1. How concerned are you about the impacts of climate change on your organisation? (1= not at all concerned and 5= very concerned) (n=28)**



slido

**Q2. Does climate change feature in your organisation's strategic planning? (1= not at all and 5= it's a major feature) (n=27)**



slido

**Q3. Have you previously raised the issue of climate change adaptation in your organisation? (n=27)**

**a. If yes, what response did you get? (n=20)**

Seventy-eight per cent of participants confirmed they had raised the issue of climate change adaptation in their organisation (Attachment 2: Slido report). The themes in open-text responses to 3a demonstrated organisations were supportive of adopting climate change in strategic planning. However, implementation was often hindered by a lack of organisational resources, skills and knowledge.

*'Supportive.' (n = 15)*

*'In terms of adaptation and public health lots of questions and lots to learn – how does it relate [to our organisation]'*

*'Need for action. But resourcing to undertake work a challenge'*

The department and the Victoria Health Building Authority (VHBA) presented on the impacts of climate change on the public health system and climate data projections for Victoria. Participants were invited to reflect on the presentation and share if and how climate change was already impacting their services. Ninety-six per cent of participants (Attachment 2: Slido results) confirmed that their organisation experienced the effects of climate change ‘on the ground’.

Word clouds were used to capture how the impacts of climate change were felt both directly and indirectly.

**Direct impacts are captured in the themes below**



**Indirect impacts are captured in themes below**



Highlighted themes demonstrate the significant impacts of climate change already being felt at a service delivery level. Themes highlight the crossover between indirect and direct impacts being seen ‘on the ground’ and the disproportionate effects this had on ‘vulnerable’ communities.

Following this reflection, the department and VHBA presented the HHS CCAAP, outlining the state’s response to climate change adaptation for the sector.

Participants were invited to discuss the HHS CCAAP in breakout rooms and representatives from the department and VHBA left the forum at this time. Participants were divided into four rooms with a VHA facilitator in each room to take notes and lead discussion around four questions:

- What role do you see your organisation playing in the achievement of climate change adaptation of the Health and Human Services system?
- What support do you need from the Health and Human Services system to better prepare for climate change?
- Are there any gaps in the HHS CCAAP, actions you disagree with, or actions you think could be improved (and how)?
- Are there particular actions you support?

### Consultation themes and opportunities

To support the department's broader consultation process, themes and opportunities identified from the forum have been linked to the questions above and engagement material provided by the department.

#### **Are there any gaps in the plan, actions you disagree with, or actions you think could be improved (and how)?**

##### **Opportunity 1: The HHS CCAAP should reflect the whole of Victoria's public health service system**

Consistent feedback throughout the forum highlighted the need to expand the scope of the HHS CCAAP to acknowledge Victoria's complete public health service system.

Participants at the forum represented a diverse range of public health services from upstream delivery of prevention approaches to downstream acute emergency services. Across the spectrum of participants, there was consensus that the plan should expand to reflect the complete health service system in Victoria and coordinate action across it.

Additionally, there has been concentrated focus on hospital assets following implementation of the *Pilot health and human services climate change adaptation action plan 2019–21*. Participants involved in this pilot project viewed it as successful, with funding, tools, guidance, and resources made available to support implementation. There was a desire to have this model of implementation replicated across the service system to create similar opportunities for community health and regional and rural health services.

##### **Opportunity 2: Implementation of the HHS CCAAP should take a coordinated approach across the public health service system**

Participants highlighted the need for climate adaptation to be delivered in a coordinated manner within the broader context of the public health service system. Participants indicated that coordination of policy direction from the department would support implementation as it streamlines service system processes and leverages finite existing resources and mechanisms.

There are many strengths within the public health service system that lend themselves to embedding adaptation, especially in the prevention space. The sector requested 'dual benefit' be central to the operationalisation of the plan and that existing frameworks and service systems be harnessed to deliver climate adaptation.

Seventy per cent of organisations represented (Attachment 2: Slido report) reported that they already consider climate change to some extent in their organisational planning. This existing work should be understood and strengthened through the coordinated delivery of the HHS CCAAP.

##### **Opportunity 3: The HHS CCAAP applies a rural and regional lens across all action area**

Forum participants called for a rural and regional lens to be applied to the HHS CCAAP. The sector highlighted the metro focus of the HHS CCAAP and requested recognition of the different needs for rural and regional parts of the state. It was noted that rural communities often experience the impacts of climate change first and in different ways to metropolitan parts of the state, and it was critical that the HSCCAAP reflected this.

## What support do you need from the Health and Human Services system to better prepare for climate change?

### Opportunity 4: HHS CCAAP implementation to be supported by appropriate resourcing, guidance and tools

As highlighted above, 78% of participants confirmed they had raised the issue of climate change adaptation in their organisation (Attachment 2: Slido report), and while organisations were supportive, there were challenges to implementation. These include a lack of resources, guidance, and setting-specific tools.

Feedback highlighted the need for the HHS CCAAP to be accompanied by tangible supports. Suggestions from participants included:

- guidance material, including climate data predictions
- setting-specific implementation tools/ case studies that reflect the complete health service system (including community health, hospitals, aged care, emergency services and rural services)
- funding/grants to support resourcing, including personnel, innovation grants, procurement trials and incentives to focus on climate adaptation
- training opportunities with 'micro credentials'
- communication toolkits.

### Opportunity 5: The HHS CCAAP is delivered alongside state-wide sector support

The sector requested ongoing support through a peer network that would help to connect services across the state on this work. Participants envisioned the network would be used for capacity building and practice sharing. Feedback demonstrated that many people working in climate adaptation would benefit from connecting with peers, learning from one another, and having regular avenues for communication within the space.

## What role do you see your organisation playing in the achievement of climate change adaptation of the Health and Human Services system?

### Opportunity 6: Clarification on the implementation of the HHS CCAAP and expectations of health services

The consultation identified a clear willingness by the Victorian public health sector to play its part in climate adaptation, however the sector sought clarity around the implementation of the HHS CCAAP. The sector indicated a desire to understand how this plan will be delivered 'on the ground'.

*'What's my role, what's the bigger picture? How do we all fit together'*

This sentiment echoed throughout the consultation forum with participants identifying a desire to engage in ongoing consultation as the HHS CCAAP is operationalised.

### Opportunity 7: The HHS CCAAP should leverage the strengths of the public health service system

Central to the discussion was how the HHS CCAAP can leverage the strengths of the health service system to support climate adaptation. Participants saw a role as local leaders in climate adaptation and support place-based responses. This was particularly noted in rural areas where health services are central to the local community.

The sector often has a strong rapport with those disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. These relationships will be critical to reaching 'at risk' communities and supporting targeted adaptation.

Participants also felt they could play a role in ensuring health service buildings are prepared for extreme weather events to avoid further climate-related service disruption.

The public health service system will require support to deliver this work. Enablers for the success of this work are indicated above.

## Next steps

The VHA will share this report with its members as part of the department's broader consultation on the HHS CCAAP.

There was strong feedback from participants that a state-wide Climate Adaptation Network would be of benefit to the sector. The VHA is aware a metro-hospital-focused network already exists and will scope opportunities to build on existing networks to provide wider sector support specific to climate change adaptation.

## Conclusion

With representatives from across Victoria's public healthcare providers, the consultation identified a clear willingness by the Victorian public health sector to play its part in climate change adaptation. Indeed, the sector identified strengths and expertise that position it to play a leading role in place-based climate responses that support local communities.

There was broad agreement among participants on what is needed to enable implementation of the HHS CCAAP in the health sector. This includes coordinated action across the whole health service system, recognition of the differences between metro, regional and rural areas, and a state-wide practice network to connect peers and support mutual learning as the work is undertaken. The sector also looks to the departments for support in the form of resources, guidance, and settings-specific tools that will help services to address implementation challenges in their settings.

The overwhelming majority of participants in the consultation reported that they are already seeing the impacts of climate change. Services are now keen to understand the nature of the expectations placed on them by the HHS CCAAP so that they can plan and respond. The VHA will facilitate sector-wide opportunities to progress the HHS CCAAP and help ensure that services are provided with the support needed to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on services, staff and communities.



### For further information contact

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### Attachment 1: Represented organisations and position title

- Ambulance Victoria: Director of Sustainability and Sustainability Analyst
- Beaufort and Skipton Health Service: Chief Executive Officer and Corporate Services Manager
- Bendigo Health: Manager Compliance and Environment
- Bendigo Loddon PCP: Senior Managers Project and Prevention
- Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership: Prevention Co-ordinator
- Cohealth: Policy Manager
- Cohuna District Hospital: Chief Executive Officer
- Dental Health Services Victoria: Director of Infrastructure and Chief Financial Officer
- EACH: Infrastructure Manager and Project Coordinator
- Enliven PCP: Planetary Health Officer and Executive Officer
- Gateway Health: General Manager
- Hepburn Shire Council: Health and Wellbeing Officer
- Inner East PCP: Executive Officer
- Inspiro: Primary Care Manager
- IPC Health: Senior Manager Property, Contracts and Procurement
- Kooweerup Regional Health Service: Health Promotion Practitioner
- Latrobe Valley Authority: Manager Co Design and Engagement
- Monash Health: Sustainability Specialist
- Palliative Care South East Ltd: General Manager Corporate Services
- Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre: Policy Advisor and Lab Manager
- Seymour Health: Facilities Manager
- South West Primary Care Partnership: Population Health Coordinator
- Southern Grampians Glenelg PCP: Manager Health and Wellbeing and Project Officer
- Southern Melbourne Primary Care Partnership: Partnership Lead
- The Royal Children's Hospital: Manager of facilities
- The Royal Children's Hospital: Director, Facilities and Emergency Management
- West Wimmera Health Service: Health Promotion Manager
- Wimmera PCP: Project Officer