

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

Guidance for local government, 2020

Climate change is both the greatest threat to public health of the 21st century and the greatest global health opportunity.^{1,2} 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.

While action to mitigate climate change is critical to lessening the impacts, adaptation action is also essential because a certain amount of climate change is locked in as a result of greenhouse gas emissions already trapped in the atmosphere. Both mitigation and adaptation-focused activities can create conditions for health co-benefits to be realised (see the *Climate change and health co-benefits* figure on page 3).

Victorian councils are in an ideal position to take actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change at the local level, and to contribute to state and national actions. They are already making progress, delivering initiatives within Victorian communities that are both health-promoting and emissions-reducing.

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 a focus area of the *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2019–2023* and, under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, councils are required to have regard to the state plan when preparing an MPHWP.

The purpose of the *Tackling climate change and its impacts on health through municipal public health and wellbeing planning: guidance for local government, 2020* is to assist councils in meeting these legislative obligations. It seeks to encourage and embed action to tackle climate change and its impacts on health in municipal public health and wellbeing planning.

Incorporating climate change into the planning cycle

The guidance builds on the department's original guidance on municipal public health and wellbeing planning by providing information on how climate change can be incorporated in each stage of planning: pre-planning, municipal scanning, engagement, planning decisions, implementation and evaluation.³ It also recognises that planning is not a linear process and that councils have strategic engagement processes that will inform the development of MPHWP. Table 1 provides a summary of how climate change can be incorporated into these stages of planning.

1 World Health Organization. *Climate change and human health*: WHO; 2015 [Available from: <https://www.who.int/globalchange/global-campaign/cop21/en/>].

2 Watts N, Adger WN, Agnolucci P, Blackstock J, Byass P, Cai W, et al. *Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health*. The Lancet. 2015;386(10006):1861-914.

3 Department of Health. *Guide to municipal public health and wellbeing planning*. Victoria, Australia: DoH; 2013.

The guidance provides examples of strategies across a number of theme areas that could be taken by councils, as well as a number of case studies of strategies that have been implemented by Victorian councils. The theme areas include:

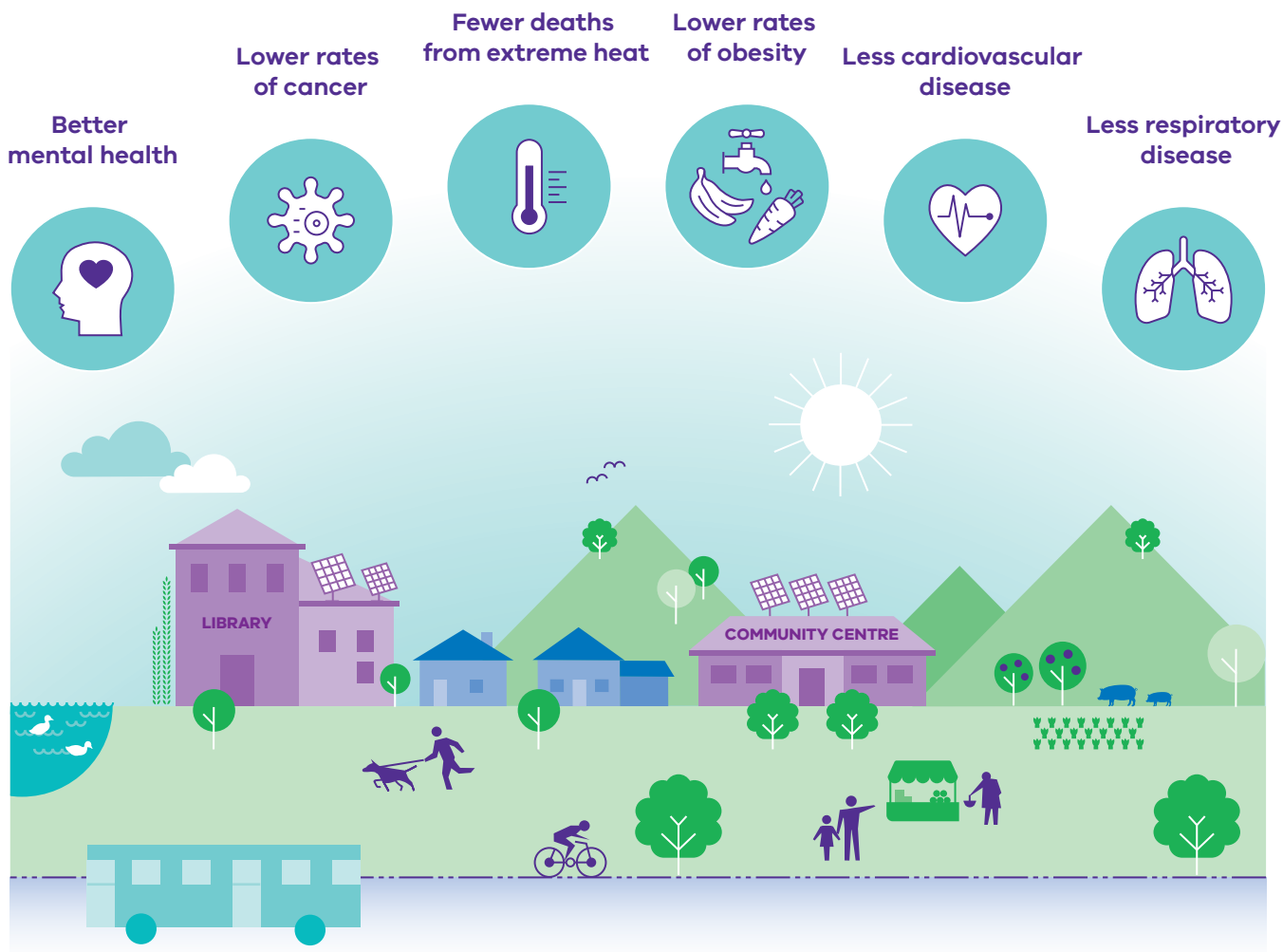
- leadership, governance and council assets
- communication, engagement and capacity building
- emergency management
- environmental health services, surveillance and monitoring
- built and natural environments
- healthy and sustainable food systems
- improving mental health and wellbeing and preventing family violence.

Table 1: Incorporating climate change into the MPHWP cycle

Planning cycle stage	How climate change features
<p>Pre-planning Creates the broad processes required to plan effectively and builds the leadership and partner support necessary to develop and implement the MPHWP.</p>	<p>Place the need to tackle climate change and its impacts on health and wellbeing on the agenda. Make the responsibility of local government clear by identifying the legislative requirements under the Climate Change Act and the 'tackling climate change and its impact on health' focus area in the <i>Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2019–2023</i> in briefings to council or senior management.</p>
<p>Municipal scanning Provides a preliminary understanding of the health and wellbeing status of the community and the determinants that contribute to this status.</p>	<p>Identify evidence of the current or potential impacts of climate change on health and wellbeing and present this in the profile of health and wellbeing challenges facing the municipality.</p> <p>Include consideration of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity indicators when considering how to frame the particular climate change challenges in the municipality and to inform potential priority areas of focus.</p>
<p>Engagement Involves internal and external stakeholders and the community in further understanding the health and wellbeing needs and strengths of the community. This stage applies these additional perspectives to the information from the municipal scan to create a fuller picture of the challenges confronting the community.</p>	<p>Present climate change or specific climate issues as a health and wellbeing priority for the municipality.</p> <p>Incorporate relevant community, stakeholder and council perceptions, experiences and activities into the health and wellbeing profile.</p>
<p>Planning decisions Involves addressing those areas where the municipal scan and engagement indicate a need for change. The change sought will focus on long-term benefits and is expressed as a goal. Once the goals are identified strategies are selected to pursue the change based on the available evidence of what works.</p>	<p>Present climate change or specific climate issues as a health and wellbeing priority for the municipality to council decision-makers.</p> <p>Identify strategies and actions that could be taken to tackle climate change and its impacts on health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Consider the impact of climate change on other priorities identified in the MPHWP. Identify strategies and actions that should be taken, including aligning with and building on other activities occurring across the organisation and in partner organisations that have co-benefits for these areas to ensure integrated climate change planning.</p>
<p>Implementation Involves putting the MPHWP into practice.</p>	<p>As per other MPHWP priorities and strategies (refer to the department's guidance on municipal public health and wellbeing planning).</p> <p>Implement actions and programs to tackle climate change and its impacts on health and consider a climate change lens when implementing actions related to other MPHWP priorities.</p>
<p>Evaluation Involves demonstrating accountability for investing resources in health and wellbeing action and for learning more about what does and does not work.</p>	<p>As per other MPHWP priorities and strategies (refer to the department's guidance on municipal public health and wellbeing planning).</p> <p>Incorporate indicators and measures to track progress on actions to tackle climate change and its impacts on health.</p>

Figure: Climate change and health co-benefits

Health benefits



Interventions

- Use renewable energy and increase energy efficiency**
- Promote active and public transport**
- Increase blue-green infrastructure**
- Eat locally produced fruit and vegetables**
- Less food from animal sources**

Co-benefits

- Fewer fossil fuels
- Reduced damp and humidity
- Thermal comfort
- Less noise
- Improved air quality
- Reduced heat in urban areas
- Lower CO₂ emissions
- Less deforestation
- Reduced livestock production
- Fewer methane emissions

Adapted from Stahl-Timmins W, Watts N. *Health and climate: co-benefits* infographic. BMJ 2016;352:i1781. Published 30 March 2016 [Available from: <https://www.bmj.com/content/352/bmj.i1781/infographic>].

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Available at the department's climate change and health webpage <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/climate-change-and-health>>.

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