

## Submission to the Victorian Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

# Inquiry into Climate Resilience

Extreme heat is a public health crisis that directly impacts many of our most vulnerable and marginalised communities. Heat impacts our physical and mental health, our environment, the economy and infrastructure. As temperatures rise, some of the community members who will be at-risk include older people, people with disabilities, young children, people working outside and people living in low energy efficiency housing. Heatwaves are our deadliest environmental disaster and kill more people than all other disasters combined.

The Greater Melbourne Heat Alliance (GMHA) is a network of organisations that aim to improve heatwave resilience in Greater Melbourne. The Alliance was initiated in 2023, and includes unions, state and local governments, health services, community services, the health sector and community groups. Members of the Alliance include organisations that work with communities impacted by extreme heat, have programs aimed at reducing the impacts of extreme heat, or are responsible in some way for the solutions to the impacts of extreme heat.

The Alliance works together by sharing knowledge and resources, holding regular meetings to discuss initiatives across Greater Melbourne aimed at enhancing resilience to heat, and collaborating on joint heat resilience projects. In November 2023, over 40 organisations and 60 individuals came together for a [heatwave disaster scenario](#) event. During this event, priorities were established for both adaptation to and transformation in response to heatwave disasters.

In this inquiry submission we have included solutions that were outlined at the heat wave disaster scenario, and case studies and stories that illustrate the aspirations of Victorians for their communities to be prepared for future climate disasters. The GMHA is coordinated by [Sweltering Cities](#), a registered health-promotion charity that works directly with communities in hot suburbs and homes to advocate and campaign for more liveable, equitable and sustainable cities.

## Recommendations

These are proposals for practical steps forward that policy makers can take towards protecting the Victorian community from heat wave disasters and addressing the social and economic causes of extreme heat vulnerability. These ideas come from different groups and aren't endorsed by any specific organisation. All of the recommendations listed here should be considered alongside the goal of strengthening community connection.

### **Prioritise the safety of vulnerable communities and social connection**

- Allocate resources to support community resilience and cohesion projects that empower local communities to better cope with extreme heat events.
- Have consistent approaches to 'Vulnerable people's registers' that services and community members understand
- Find ways to fund solar, community battery and renewable energy projects targeting people living with income or energy insecurity. Gather and share data on heat health impacts, opportunities for improved data sharing and benefits of housing upgrades.

### **Improve systems for a 'whole-of-government' response**

Equip all levels of government and all departments to participate in reducing heat wave risk and the underlying drivers of extreme heat vulnerability, emphasising improved coordination and communication.

Suggestions for how to do this include:

- Identify gaps in communication and coordination.
- Ensure that all resources and guidance for local government and agencies are easily accessible, avoiding scattering information across various documents.
- Clarify roles, triggers for actions, and funding arrangements.
- Identify skills or training gaps and implement a plan to meet the demand for additional skills or workers.
- Create guidance for how cool safe spaces will operate.

### **Identify gaps in communication and coordination**

- Make sure all resources and guidance for local government and agencies are easily accessible, not difficult to find or spread out over different documents.
- Clarify roles, triggers for actions, funding arrangements
- Identify skills or training gaps and implement a plan to meet demand for additional skills or workers
- Create guidance for how cool safe spaces will work

### **Improve heat health information**

We need new campaigns to send a clear message that heatwaves can be a deadly disaster and provide people with the information to stay cool, identify heat related diseases and support others. Communications should be available in a range of languages and be culturally

appropriate. Programs should be local, and have specific advice for different vulnerable groups. Consider application of local, place-based coordination of information and support.

### **Local food security**

Encourage local food production in public and private space and local food procurement to reduce the need for long-distance transportation of goods and ensure food security in the face of heat-induced disruptions.

### **Safe homes**

Implement and enforce legislation that mandates cooling and insulation standards for new homes and existing rental properties, ensuring that buildings are designed for energy efficiency and thermal comfort. Fund retrofitting programs for low income homeowners and people who rent in private and social housing. Aim for all homes to be heatwave safe.

### **Cool Suburbs**

Promote Urban Greening to create more green spaces in the city, reduce heat islands, and enhance cooling. Do this by:

- Setting higher urban green cover goals across the city
- Incentivising private landowners to invest in urban greening
- Funding local councils, community groups and others to maintain new and established trees
- Use design and materials to reduce the urban heat island effect. Do this by:
- Introducing regulations for cooler roofing and building materials and colours.
- Developing urban planning strategies that prioritise pedestrian-friendly, shaded walkways and open spaces, reducing the dependency on cars and minimising exposure to extreme heat.

### **Safe havens**

Identify which community centres, schools, neighbourhood houses, pools, libraries and other locations across the city might be suitable and willing to act as cool safe spaces over the summer. Support these centres with resources and funding so that emergency management duties don't fall on staff or communities that are already stretched.

## **Resources and Case Studies**

This section contains additional information to inform the inquiry's work and further research.

[Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment](#)

[The Hotspots Initiative: Place-based, cross-sector collaborations responding to the health impacts of heatwaves](#)

[The link between disadvantage and extreme heat in Melbourne | VCOSS](#)

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES GO HERE**