



Climate Health WA Inquiry

WALGA Submission

September 2019

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1.0 Background and introduction

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is the united voice of Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of 138 Local Governments in Western Australia.

The Association provides an essential voice for over 1,200 Elected Members and approximately 22,000 Local Government employees, as well as over 2.5 million constituents of Local Governments in Western Australia. The Association also provides professional advice and services that provide financial benefits to the Local Governments and the communities they serve.

One of Local Government's roles is to facilitate information sharing and to provide ongoing support for its local community. Broadly, Local Government is active in capacity building, strengthening and supporting collaborations, partnerships and networks, undertaking education, awareness and information sharing activities and provision of support to community through funding and annual grants programs.

The Association welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Climate Health Inquiry. The comments contained in this submission have not yet been considered or endorsed by WALGA's State Council, as such, please be advised that this is an interim submission and that the Association reserves the right to modify or withdraw the comments as directed by State Council.

The Local Government sector in Western Australia is committed to addressing climate change. The WALGA [Policy Statement on Climate Change](#), endorsed by WALGA State Council in July 2018 states:

Local Government acknowledges:

- I. The science is clear: climate change is occurring and greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are the dominant cause.
- II. Climate change threatens human societies and the Earth's ecosystems.
- III. Urgent action is required to reduce emissions, and to adapt to the impacts from climate change that are now unavoidable.
- IV. A failure to adequately address this climate change emergency places an unacceptable burden on future generations.

Local Government is committed to addressing climate change.

Local Government is calling for:

- I. Strong climate change action, leadership and coordination at all levels of government.
- II. Effective and adequately funded Commonwealth and State Government climate change policies and programs.

WALGA notes that the State Government is currently developing a State Government Climate Change Policy and has announced a net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 target.

WALGA considers that the findings and recommendations of the Climate Health Inquiry should inform the State policy and the pathway to achieve the target.

WALGA agrees with the comments made in the State Governments Climate Change issues paper that climate change will exacerbate existing health burdens by increasing injury, physical and mental illness, and that it will lead to alterations in the distribution of vector-, water- and food-borne infectious diseases, and air pollution patterns.

WALGA consider it important that research into changing patterns of disease and other health consequences of climate change is sufficiently funded to lessen the impacts of these changes. In particular we are of the view that local government needs additional funding assistance to help prevent and treat these health impacts at the local level, particularly in relation to vector-borne diseases or managing heat-related illness.

WALGA considers that the findings and recommendations of the Climate Health Inquiry should inform the State policy and the pathway to achieve the target and clearly establish funding mechanisms for mitigating impacts at both the State and Local Government level. In making this submission, WALGA has restricted its comments to the Terms of Reference that most directly associate with the roles and responsibilities of the Local Government Sector and the existing advocacy positions of the Association (Appendix 1).

2.0 Comments in response to the Terms of Reference

2.1 Establish current knowledge on the implications of climate change for health in Western Australia (WA) and recommend a framework for evaluating future implications.

The Association recognises the significant impact climate change is having and will continue to have on Western Australia's climate:

- Drier and hotter in the south west, with more extreme weather events and more variability in the North West.
- Longer fire seasons with more extreme fire danger days, greater proportion of rainfall from heavy rainfall events and increased storm surge, inundation and recessions.
- An increase in the frequency and volatile nature of weather events becoming more extreme to catastrophic.

It is clear that these impacts have broad implications across government, communities, industries and the environment. As stated in the *Climate Change in Western Australia Issues Paper* released by the State Government in September 2019 (p1):

Climate Change will see a need for greater emphasis on disaster preparedness and increase the challenge of protecting vulnerable infrastructure and communities. Some agricultural areas in Western Australia may become marginal and cities and towns will be exposed to rising sea levels.

And:

Meanwhile more severe heatwaves and changing patterns of disease have the potential to affect health and wellbeing of Western Australians, particularly the vulnerable.

And:

Climate Change will exacerbate existing health burdens by increasing injury, physical and mental illness and the frequency of extreme weather events (floods, droughts, heatwaves and storms). Climate change will also lead to alterations in the distribution of vector-, water- and food-borne infectious diseases, and air pollution patterns (p18).

In its March 2016 report *The Economic Cost of the Social Impact of Natural Disasters*, the Australian Business Round Table estimated that the total cost of natural disasters in Australia, which in 2015 exceeded \$9 billion, or 0.6% of GDP, will double by 2030 and reach an average of \$33 billion a year by 2050. The report found the social (intangible) costs, such as health and wellbeing of individuals and families, and/or the effect on the social fabric of affected communities such as increased mental health issues, family violence, alcohol consumption and chronic and non-communicable diseases, were at least equal to the physical (tangible) costs.

As stated in the State Public Health Plan for Western Australia, heatwaves are responsible for more deaths in Australia than any other natural disaster and will likely worsen with climate change.

Managing the impacts of climate change will place increasing demands on the resources of all levels of government. In this context, WALGA **considers it essential that planning for the impacts of climate change be embedded into policy development and decision making across and between all levels of government.** Appropriate planning and investment can reduce the impact of climate change, including the demand for health services.

2.2 Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will protect the public from the harmful health impacts of climate change.

An effective response to climate change requires strategic, long term planning to ensure that climate change adaptation and mitigation considerations are embedded across Government projects and policies. A program of work to protect the public from the harmful health impacts of climate change needs to be wide ranging and strategic in the same way. While many Local Governments are active in climate change mitigation and adaptation planning, those actions can be limited by the overarching policies and strategies at the State level.

WALGA, with the assistance of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC), Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) and LGIS is currently undertaking a project under the Natural Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP) aimed at assisting Local Governments to prepare and plan for the increased incidence and severity of natural disasters as a result of climate change. The Climate Resilient Councils - preparing for impacts of climate change will undertake an initial assessment of the extent to which climate change and disaster

management are currently embedded in the decision-making and governance documents of all Western Australian Local Governments and develop targeted guidance materials for Local Governments to assist them in to improve performance against established benchmarks.

It is recommended that the State Government undertake a similar program of work to assess preparedness across all portfolios and then embed effective planning for climate change, including the effects on human health, across the whole of government. Local Governments will then be able to align and coordinate their own strategies and plans in line with State Government strategic policies and plans.

Policy areas for focus should include:

Public Health Plans

- The Association acknowledges that the State Public Health Plan for Western Australia 2019-24 (the Plan) refers to the impacts of climate change on public health, including that climate change adaptation plans incorporate plans to protect public health, and ensuring public health is incorporated into emergency and disaster planning.
- The program of work following this Inquiry should include a review of the Plan to ensure it adequately incorporates planning around climate change. Local Governments in line with the Plan can then develop the community-level public health plans. A comprehensive state level plan will also help to ensure comprehensive and effective community level Local Government Public Health Plans.

Land use and transport planning

Changing climatic conditions, reduced rainfall, decreased groundwater availability, and loss of tree canopy cover are contributing to the urban heat island effect, increasing temperatures across many parts of the metropolitan area, where the ambient temperature of urban areas is significantly higher than surrounding rural or natural areas. Not only does this result in increased energy and water costs, it impacts the health of many in the community, particularly children, the elderly and lower socioeconomic groups who are most vulnerable to heat related illness and death.

Land use planning policies have the capacity to contribute to a built form and design of the urban environment that can enhance the resilience of communities to the impacts of climate change. For example, research undertaken by Monash University suggests that for Perth, over two consecutive days with an average temperature of 44°C, heat related mortality may increase by 30%. However, this mortality rate can reduce by 20% through reducing air temperature by 1 to 2°C. In this context State planning and environmental regulation policies should:

- Require due regard be given to the retention of native vegetation and design of green public spaces that improve urban amenity and reduce the heat island effect.
 - For example, the [Perth and Peel @3.5million Framework](#) should embed sustainability and urban forests as a means of reducing air pollution and minimising the impact of urban heat islands.
 - Adoption of the principles within the [Better Urban Forest Guide](#), along with proposed changes to State Government planning policies have the potential to realise higher

density and improved social amenity, including resilience to climate change impacts, with consequent benefits for public health.

- Enforce existing building regulations to ensure that energy efficiency requirements in completed buildings are achieved.
- Encourage and facilitate the use of public transport and active transport such as walking and cycling, which as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, have their own health benefits.

Implemented at the Local Government level, effective policies can encourage planting of trees in urban areas to assist in urban cooling, reducing the urban heat island effect, improving air quality, increasing walkability, creating liveable communities, greater use of recreational spaces, reducing energy consumption and increased beautification and desirability of urban environments.

- Many Local Governments are implementing urban forest plans and WALGA has convened an Urban Forest Working Group for Local Governments to collaborate on addressing barriers to the retention of tree canopy.

Public Infrastructure

Ensure resources are available for the provision of appropriate public spaces and facilities that provide respite from, and enable activities to be undertaken during, heat and extreme weather such as sporting and aquatic facilities, community centres, libraries and shaded community spaces.

The Association supports the Department of Health in playing a stronger advocacy role in urban design. This would drive stronger legislation around urban greening and climate sensitive design in both infill and greenfields developments. Examples may include Better Urban Water Management, Design WA and Water Corporation Drainage Design Standards.

Greening delivers physical and mental health outcomes through reduced urban heat islands and promotion of social interaction and connection between the community and their natural environment. Identification of greenspace programs in public spaces and urban design may be linked to Local Government public health plans.

Emergency Management

Emergency Management is defined in the *Emergency Management Act (2005)* as the management of the adverse effects of an emergency including prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. All four aspects are required to provide a comprehensive approach to managing the hazards and risks that face our communities. Local Governments are assigned responsibilities across all aspects of emergency management with significant resources committed to responding to these hazards.

The Local Government sector considers there should be greater emphasis placed on, and resources allocated to, prevention, preparedness and recovery. What we do before will have a significant impact on the long term recovery required post incident. In particular, Local Governments require:

- Contemporary legislation which supports mitigation and community preparedness. The sector strongly supports the prioritisation of the drafting of the new combined Emergency Services Act.
- Mitigation policy and funding for the sector to implement treatment options emanating from the emergency risk management process required to be undertaken by all Local Governments. Whilst the Mitigation Activity Fund was a commitment of the current State government, it is currently only available for bushfire mitigation activities.
- Access to community recovery funding under the Disaster Relief Funding Arrangements Western Australia (DRFAWA) and funding to support the building of resilient infrastructure.

Community Development

Local Governments already provide a strong connection with their communities and actively implement community development programs to build community resilience. This includes initiatives to enhance community wellbeing, which, through increasing social infrastructure and community capacity, impact how communities respond to future climate change impacts. It is likely there will be an increased demand on these activities, particularly for vulnerable and target groups. The Association supports:

- Sharing of success stories on how to support these target groups and scale up and across Local Government
- Identifying and linking with programs such as Ageing in Place and Know Your Neighbour that build social capital

2.3 Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will strengthen the preparedness and resilience of communities and health services against extreme weather events, with a focus on the most vulnerable in the community.

Strengthening the preparedness and resilience of communities and health services against extreme weather events, with a focus on the most vulnerable in the community, is the greatest line of defence to face the challenges of climate health.

The Association recommends that the Inquiry consider:

- *Sustainable Facilities* – an audit of community facilities to identify alternative optimisation and utilisation solutions such as:
 - Multiuse of buildings and activities outside core function hours (e.g. as a cool refuge during heat waves)
 - Co-location and shared use of key community and social infrastructure in precincts, or activity centres to promote better use of existing infrastructure and facilities, reduce traffic movements and establish a sense of social cohesion, e.g. child health clinics, recreation centres and evacuation centres.

- *Data and Evaluation* - The development of clear, simple and consistent messages, such as flow charts and infographics that communicate how climate change can affect health is a most effective resource.
 - Supported by a Health and Wellbeing Indicator Framework for Western Australia that supports Local Government public health planning.
 - Currently there is no link to climate health through the Health and Wellbeing Surveillance System. A review of the functionality and effectiveness of the current information is required.

2.4 Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will reduce the contribution of WA health services to climate change and other detrimental impacts.

2.5 Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will enable WA Health services to implement change, including energy efficiency, to a more sustainable model.

Given the link to climate change and human health WALGA considers the Department of Health should be taking a leadership role in championing change through reducing its environmental footprint and committing to take action to reduce the impact to human health from the effects of climate change.

All Department of Health major facilities should be subject to comprehensive waste management and energy audits, inclusive of the setting of waste reduction and energy reduction targets, the development of prioritised implementation strategies on what waste reduction and energy reduction options provide the highest return on investment, and the regular monitoring and reporting of actions delivered against agreed timelines for implementation.

2.6 Evaluate the likely benefits (health and wellbeing, social and economic) arising from climate change mitigation strategies, with a focus on WA health services.

The Local Government Sector supports, and is contributing to, national and international emissions reduction targets to achieve the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global temperature rise to well below 2° Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5° Celsius.

The announcement by the Western Australian Government of a net zero emissions by 2050 target is also welcomed and supported by Local Government. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, reduction of global emissions to net zero by

2050 is essential to have a reasonable chance of limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius. In its report [Global Warming of 1.5° Celsius](#), the IPCC found that:

Any increase in global warming is projected to affect human health, with primarily negative consequences (high confidence). Lower risks are projected at 1.5°C than at 2° Celsius for heat-related morbidity and mortality (very high confidence) and for ozone-related mortality if emissions needed for ozone formation remain high (high confidence). Urban heat islands often amplify the impacts of heatwaves in cities (high confidence). Risks from some vector-borne diseases, such as malaria and dengue fever, are projected to increase with warming from 1.5° Celsius to 2° Celsius, including potential shifts in their geographic range (high confidence).

The IPCC also found that extreme heatwaves will be experienced by 14% of the world's population at least once every five years at 1.5° Celsius. But that figure rises to more than a third of the planet if temperatures rise to 2° Celsius.

The *Lancet Countdown 2018 Report Briefing* for Australian Policymakers states:

Importantly, tackling the causes and consequences of climate change presents significant opportunities for Australian policymakers across a variety of sectors. From a health perspective, taking action to curb emissions will accrue numerous population-level benefits, such as reductions in cardiovascular and respiratory disease rates, with associated healthcare cost savings. Meanwhile, proactive measures to increase the resilience and adaptive capabilities of Australian health systems are likely to generate long-term economic savings, partly due to their positive impact on mental health.

There are a range of benefits that arise from mitigation strategies, including localised health benefits of reduced pollution and the potential economic benefit flowing from a more diversified economy as it transitions to a lower carbon industries and economy.

The relationship between a Local Government and its community is fundamental and significant, and the links with community groups is a valuable tool to assist in:

- Reducing greenhouse emissions to reduce human health impacts.
- Reducing the severity of climate change impacts.
- Reducing the impact on the public health system.
- Empowering people to live healthy lives.
- Providing health protection for the community.
- Improving Aboriginal health and wellbeing.
- Delivering measures to improve community resilience.
- Building social capital and capacity of key stakeholders.

- Building relationships between volunteers, Local Governments and those stakeholders not usually or always considered in climate emergencies.
- Building capacity of key stakeholders in preparation for an emergency event.
- Mitigating the impact of public health emergencies through prevention, rapid response and recovery.

The Association's Climate Change Policy Statement expressly acknowledges this, and it is recommended that an effective policy on climate change and health must be consistent with a credible emissions reduction trajectory to net zero emissions by 2050, and a commitment to advocate for stronger action at the national level, including ramping up Australia's Paris commitment to bring it in line with climate science.

2.7 Define the role of the Department of Health in leading public policy on climate change and health.

The findings of this Climate Health Inquiry should be considered as part of the development of the State Climate Change Policy, the emissions reduction pathway to net zero emissions by 2050 target announced by the State Government and in advocating for more effective action on climate change by the Commonwealth Government.

WALGA considers that the Department of Health should:

- Publicly recognise climate change as a health emergency, in line with the recent declaration by the Australian Medical Association, given the clear scientific evidence of the health impacts of climate change.
- Take a lead role in informing and educating medical practitioners, the public and key stakeholders about the impacts of climate change on public health and the prevention and treatment of health effects such as vector-borne diseases or heat-related illness.
- Review the State Public Health Plan to ensure it adequately incorporates planning for the health impacts of climate change and ensure the delivery of the Plan's priority actions.
- Work with and advocate for action by other portfolios and levels of government where their policies and programs could reduce the adverse effects of climate change on health.
- Recognise the impact of climate change impacts such as heat, drought and natural disasters on mental health, prioritise mental health services, particularly in rural areas of Western Australia.
- Establish a Sustainability Unit within the Department of Health to provide stewardship in matters of climate change and sustainability across the Department and the WA health system.
- Ensure that the Future Health Research and Innovation Fund is established in a manner that encourages, supports and allows for investigation, research and development on climate change and health, and environmental sustainability solutions.

2.8 Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for undertaking a climate change vulnerability assessment for the health sector.

2.9 Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for developing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the health sector.

No comment is provided on these two terms of reference at this time. The Association welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Local Government sector more broadly in these areas, should the occasion present itself.

3.0 Conclusion

Good health is essential to the wellbeing of the communities that Local Government serve.

Impacts of climate change such as heatwaves and extreme weather events, an increase in pollutants and allergens and changing patterns of disease, have the capacity to affect the health of all West Australians particularly the vulnerable.

The Association recognises that given Local Governments role in the delivery and support of many of the matters discussed in this submission, that the additional Local Government costs incurred be considered and appropriately resourced by current and future State governments.

The Association encourages the Department of Health to continue to build resilience into the health system to ensure that there is the adaptive capacity to deal with the increased stresses that climate change will create on a health system already under pressure.

Appendix 1 - Current Policy and Advocacy positions

WALGA's Public Health Advocacy

The introduction of the new *Public Health Act 2016* for Western Australia requires Local Government to develop Local Public Health Plans. WALGA State Council has consistently advocated for the review of the Public Health Act and appropriate resourcing as a foundation for a risk management approach to public health for both State and Local Government. (Resolutions 0159.COM.6/2005, 307.6/2007, 9.1/2015). To support Local Government's interest during the implementation and beyond of the *Public Health Act 2016*, the Association developed a [Public Health Advocacy Plan](#) located on the WALGA website.

WALGA's Regional Health Advocacy

Regional Local Governments approached WALGA to advocate for greater support for health services in their regions. Regional, rural or remote areas with small or disperses population can lack adequate numbers of medical services to appropriately respond to health issues and emergencies in the community. The Association's approach to [Regional Health Advocacy](#) is available on the WALGA website.

WALGA's Policy Statement on Climate Change

WALGA's [Policy Statement on Climate Change](#) aligns with this Inquiry. WALGA State Council endorsed the following position on climate change in July 2018:

Local Government is committed to addressing climate change and acknowledges:

1. The science is clear: climate change is occurring and greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are the dominant cause.
2. Climate change threatens human societies and the Earth's ecosystems.
3. Urgent action is required to reduce emissions, and to adapt to the impacts from climate change that are now unavoidable.
4. A failure to adequately address this climate change emergency places an unacceptable burden on future generations.

Local Government is calling for:

1. Strong climate change action, leadership and coordination at all levels of government.
2. Effective and adequately funded Commonwealth and State Government climate change policies and programs.

WALGA's Emergency Management Advocacy

The *Emergency Management Act 2005* prescribes Local Governments to undertake emergency risk management assessments, establish and chair a Local Emergency Management Committee, develop and maintain Local Emergency Management Arrangements, manage recovery following an emergency and appoint Local Recovery Coordinators.

The *Bushfires Act 1954* conveys a number of specific powers on Local Government which include: establishing and maintaining bush fire brigades as a part of its organisation for the prevention, control and extinguishment of bushfires, making local laws requiring owners and occupiers of land in its district to clear firebreaks in such a manner as is prescribed,

enforcement of these local laws to improve prevention and preparedness activities in their community.

WALGA support the prioritisation of the drafting of the *Emergency Services Acts 2005* as a means of providing the sector with a contemporary legislative framework from which to undertake critical mitigation and preparedness activities. The Act Review will be coordinated by DFES and will amalgamate the *Fire Brigades Act 1942*, *Bush Fires Act 1954* and the *Fire & Emergency Services Act 1998*. The aim of the Review is to create a single comprehensive Emergency Services Act, which will improve community safety and better support all emergency services in the future. The legislation is currently awaiting drafting priority and is critical for the sector to ensure the correct powers and mechanisms are available for mitigation and community preparedness.