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Climate change adaptation planning for decision-makers

Adaptation planning for community service organisations and primary care partnerships

Policy guidance **for** State Government

Policy brief Part I

Contributors

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Overview

Well-documented evidence is emerging that climate change impacts represent significant threats to our health and wellbeing, and will exacerbate the social, economic and environmental challenges of the health and community service sector.

This has particular implications for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in our communities. Due to underlying social and economic issues that often disadvantage them compared with other groups, people with a disability or special needs are considered particularly vulnerable to the impacts of a changing climate.

To support these people, governments and relevant organisations will need to engage in adaptation planning. Primary health and community welfare organisations in particular can play a central role in facilitating improvements to community resilience – a key adaptation strategy. These organisations are very well placed to appraise local differences, identify those most in need, and deliver just and equitable support programs.

The Implementing Adaptation project developed sector specific guidance for adaptation planning. Now the challenge is to ensure institutional support for implementation of newly developed approaches and practices.

The brief

This policy brief is for Victorian State Government departments. It aims to inform state-level policy and programs that could support climate change adaptation (CCA) planning by community service organisations (CSOs) and primary care partnerships (PCPs).

This brief summarises results of the VCCCAR Implementing Adaptation project, a study that sought to better understand the adaptation planning capacities and needs of CSOs and PCPs (Fünfgeld et al. 2013). That study also facilitated the testing and implementation of adaptation planning approaches.

Part I outlines the need for state-level support and coordination for adaptation planning and implementation in CSOs and PCPs. Parts II and III provide specific suggestions for key policy portfolios:

- **Part II: Health**
- **Part III: Human Services**

Highlighted in each part are key policy issues that either support or hinder CCA planning by CSOs and PCPs. Emphasis is placed on the need for coordinated efforts and specific portfolio barriers and opportunities.

Climate change is already affecting health and community services, particularly during extreme weather events.

Governments have a duty of care to support health and community service organisations in planning for climate change.

A range of tools and methods can be tailored to support the sector's capacity in adaptation planning.

CSOs deliver essential social services to disadvantaged groups but they are not yet well equipped to tackle climate change impacts.

CSOs and PCPs are well aware of the risks climate change poses to them and their clients but not how to best embark on adaptation.

CSOs and PCPs

Community service organisations (CSOs) aim to meet the needs of community members requiring care, support, protection or accommodation. This includes out-of-home care services, disability services, community-based child and family services, housing and other types of support for disadvantaged people. DHS currently funds over 600 CSOs.

Primary care partnerships (PCPs) aim to improve the health and wellbeing of the population through better coordination of health service planning, delivery and continuity of health care including chronic disease prevention, integrated health promotion, and partnerships. DoH funds 30 regional PCPs. PCP members and partner agencies include hospitals, community health organisations, divisions of general practice, and local government.

Why do CSOs and PCPs need to plan for adaptation?

Climate change impacts will include a range of social and economic effects including; temporary or permanent displacement, mental health problems, loss or disruption of employment, homelessness, and increased domestic violence.

In helping organisations prepare for, avoid, and minimise these types of impacts, adaptation planning can:

- Support those most vulnerable to climate change impacts
- Manage climate change impacts on environmental and social justice
- Address issues of energy affordability
- Support environmental sustainability of organisations
- Support community development and resilience.

A VCCCAR project developed guidance specifically to support this sector in their adaptation planning. This guidance now is now ready to be trialled and refined by a wide range of organisations across the sector.

Support and coordination

While the implementation of Victoria's Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2013) may go some way to addressing fragmented and unclear responsibilities and mandates for adaptation across the sector, there remains a need for specific and explicit inclusion of adaptation planning into health and community welfare sector planning. Such plans will need to facilitate clarification, agreement, and adequate support for a range of roles and responsibilities.

Participating organisations suggested that much of the current thinking in the primary health and community welfare sector is focused on reactive responses after extreme weather events, rather than planning ahead for a changing climate and its more pervasive implications.

While CSOs and PCPs receive some broad policy guidance on considering climate change impacts as part of their planning and operations (such as the Victorian Climate Change Act), this guidance is currently quite limited. This suggests adaptation planning and action is a lower order priority for the sector. Stronger support from the State Government, through a capacity building and planning program is required.

Policy and practice needs:

- localised, accessible information on impacts (Climate Change Act 2010)
- testing and refining of practical adaptation planning guidance
- sector-wide capacity building program
- state government support for adaptation planning
- clarification of roles and responsibilities between governments, and between government and the sector
- support for relevant organisations to undertake, implement, monitor and maintain adaptation plans and their adaptive capacity.

Most PCPs have not yet systematically considered climate change impacts and adaptation planning in their work.

A small number of PCPs have adopted adaptation as a key organisational priority and/or are developing a capacity for adaptation through specific projects and activities.

Health

Key messages:

- A growing body of evidence highlights the health implications of climate change
- Adaptation needs to be a formal priority for the health sector
- PCPs require a State Government mandate to embed adaptation into their strategic plans, and they require support and capacity to achieve this
- PCPs could be supported to become coordinators for adaptation planning and action in the health sector
- Adaptation planning in the sector must build upon and move beyond emergency and extreme event planning.

Health impacts of climate change

Main direct physical effects of climate change:

- injury and death from extreme weather events such as floods, bushfires, and storms
- physical impacts of increased temperatures and heat waves, such as heat exhaustion and heat stress
- spread of vector-borne diseases
- impacts on air quality and respiratory illness
- changes in food and water quality and availability due to changing rainfall patterns.

More pervasive impacts include:

- adverse mental health impacts
- dietary impacts due to increases in fresh food prices, resulting in reduced nutrition
- exacerbation of asthma and allergy conditions from increases in pollens etc.
- displacement and the physical health risks linked to being an environmental refugee
- increased pressures on health systems, community and emergency services.

Current practice

Respondents suggested that climate change adaptation planning is not currently a priority for their partner agencies or the Department of Health (DoH).

In most PCPs, adaptation is predominantly discussed and considered within the context of emergency management. Some recognise that small windows of opportunity exist after extreme weather events to consider climate change as a more pervasive, systemic issue (and therefore, a priority) for the health sector.

There is much to be learned from PCPs that changed their strategies to address climate change impacts following their experience of the millennial drought

While many PCP respondents considered climate change adaptation an increasingly important issue for the sector, competing resource priorities makes it difficult for them and their partner agencies to fulfil their existing responsibilities, let alone undertake adaptation planning. However, many respondents argued that if adequately supported, PCPs could play a key facilitation role at local and regional scales to increase awareness and capacity to plan for climate change impacts on individual and community health.

A number of strategies could be employed to support adaptation planning among PCPs, including guidance through an adaptation planning process and supporting climate change adaptation champions.

Adaptation planning

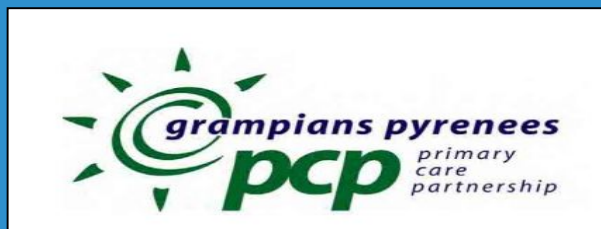
Community-level organisations can be instrumental in planning for and responding to climate change impacts in an inclusive, fair and proactive manner; playing a significant role in building community resilience.

While participating organisations have some existing plans and practices from which they can draw, a number of challenges associated with enacting an effective adaptive strategy need to be addressed.

Primary health care and community service organisations will need to be prepared to modify existing prevention strategies as new information arises and develop new policies as new climate-related threats arise. This will require flexibility in planning, implementation, funding and evaluation of plans.

A number of strategies could be employed to support adaptation planning among PCPs and the wider primary health and community welfare sector. These include:

- making adaptation a strategic priority across the sector
- a dedicated capacity building program (which would also achieve disaster risk management objectives)
- improved access to practical guidance and facilitation for adaptation planning, implementation and monitoring
- active support CSOs and PCPS in undertaking for 'community-based adaptation planning'
- supporting climate change adaptation champions and those willing to show leadership.



Grampians Pyrenees PCP

The GPPCP undertook their adaptation planning process using a combination of VCCCAR's Adaptation Navigator and some tools from UKCIP's Adaptation Wizard.

The Adaptation Navigator was used to scope out an adaptation plan. Using a hard copy of the navigator map, they discussed and selected five of the ten high level areas from the navigator map for action. UKCIP's Adaptation Wizard notepad helped them document their aims, decisions, stakeholders and motivations.

Through the process, GPPCP produced an adaptation handbook for partner agencies. This handbook serves as a starting point for engagement with a diverse range of members and stakeholders on climate change adaptation. Other stages of the navigator were explored through the production of the handbook, so as to showcase regionally specific information, as well as resources and tools that can assist members of the PCP in conducting their own climate change adaptation planning.

The GPPCP handbook outlines a business case for adaptation, knowing the climate science, assessing the effects of climate change and understanding the policy context. It is written in the context of the health and community sector.

Human services

Key messages:

- CSOs are in a unique position to consider the social implications of climate change through their advocacy and client-based work
- Adaptation planning in CSOs requires a program of direct engagement with facilitation to support collaborative learning
- CSOs require ongoing support if they are to undertake, implement and monitor adaptation planning.

While adaptation is currently not explicitly embedded in CSOs, climate change issues are already linked to existing agendas and areas of work.

CSOs represent critical social infrastructure that supports society's resilience in the face of climate change. Because their focus is on identifying, improving understanding and, importantly, addressing social vulnerabilities and various forms of social and economic disadvantage, CSOs are in a unique position to experience, document and address some of the social impacts of climate change.

In this research project, social justice and equity considerations stood out as a key trigger for considering climate change in CSO's strategies and operations.

Although the research only covered a small subset of CSOs, the initial interviews informing the project represent the largest known consultation regarding adaptation planning within this sector.

The interviews and testing of adaptation planning tools suggest that adaptation is currently not well embedded in CSOs. This is despite the fact that many existing agendas and areas of CSO work are directly linked to climate change adaptation and community resilience.

Many CSOs described the pervasive impacts of climate change on communities and individuals, including disproportionate effects on people with disabilities, the role of social isolation in exacerbating the impacts of climate change, as well as regionalised and gendered impacts.

CSO representatives also highlighted that extreme events interrupt services vital to vulnerable people, while at the same time exposing CSO employees to the same hazards.

For example, during a bushfire, flood or heatwave, CSO employees are concerned about themselves, their families, and their clients – all of whom are located in different places, at different times, with different needs.

Interviewees consistently argued that passive provision of more information was insufficient without support to interpret and use it. However, the majority of respondents highlighted a lack of specific information tailored to their key areas of work, such as information on implications of climate change for people with a disability, or the gendered implications of climate change issues.

Many respondents expressed a need for clear policy guidance on tackling adaptation planning. They argued that alongside such guidance, support and leadership from their senior management is crucial for progress, as are support for staff to participate in relevant professional and informational networks.

Adaptation planning in CSOs needs to build upon and move beyond a focus on planning for emergency preparedness and recovery.

Current action: Emergency management planning

The research findings indicate that CSOs and PCPs are generally focused on emergency management, particularly on response and recovery, as their approach to climate change adaptation.

For example, when asked about the state of adaptation in the sector, 87 per cent of interviewees discussed emergency management and associated terms (e.g. planning emergency response or recovery) instead of talking about climate change adaptation or proactive adaptation planning.

Several respondents suggested that emergency management is the default approach to adaptation within the sector. Some argued that the core issue impeding strategic adaptation planning in the sector was a decreased sense of urgency that is instilled immediately after an extreme event.

Adaptation planning for CSOs: Beyond emergency management

Planning for extreme events alone can be a short-sighted strategy. Not only are such events projected to become more frequent and intense with climate change, climate change is likely to have more pervasive impacts that will alter what and who is vulnerable to the impacts of such events.

However, emergency response planning represents a sound basis for moving into preparedness planning, resilience building, and ultimately into strategic adaptation planning.

Building on emergency management planning could enable CSOs to 'capture' the increased community cohesion and improved collaboration among the network of health service providers that CSOs observed following droughts, floods, bushfires or other extreme weather events.

This research indicates that adaptation planning in CSOs would also benefit from a systematic and sustained approach to reflection and learning following extreme weather events. For example, an integrated program of guidance and facilitation could encourage the sharing of experiences, approaches to issues, identification of knowledge and practice gaps, and collective learning across the sector.

Adaptation planning in CSOs would also benefit from the strategies identified on page 4 for the health sector.

Experiences in this project showed that adaptation planning across the sector would be well served by government assistance in scenario-based, strategic planning. This is primarily because of the existing skill and knowledge base in the sector regarding community resilience and vulnerabilities - an excellent base for adaptation planning.

Dame Pattie Menzies Centre Inc. (DPMC)

DPMC is a non-profit, community-based organisation which provides a support service for people with disabilities. The rural based centre supports the people of Alexandra and surrounding areas.

Following the 2009 bushfires, DPMC were reviewing their emergency management plans. Concurrent with this review, was a strategic planning review, including preparing the business for change and minimising energy expenses. The synergistic timing of these reviews enabled staff to take a broader and more long-term view of the business in the context of climate change projections.

DPMC used UKCIP's Adaptation Wizard to guide them in their adaptation planning process. They used the GROW Model to identify potential adaptation options.

The GROW Model is available from Mind Tools:
www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_89.htm



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