

# Climate change adaptation: Briefing note 1

# Community Services Organisations

## Who might this be relevant for:

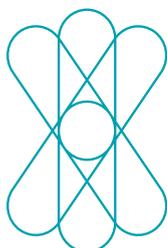
Charitable organisations, welfare agencies, community groups, health service providers, migrant support agencies

Community Service Organisations (CSOs) in Australia are used to dealing with the impacts of extreme events such as bushfires and floods. They are one of the most effective channels to assist the more vulnerable members of our communities, and are strong advocates for their needs and rights. Future climate change is likely to make some of these events occur more often and/or to become more severe, so increasing the responsibilities of CSOs. These changes may challenge the ability of CSOs to continue to operate effectively and to address the needs of their clients.

In this briefing, we outline the challenges that CSOs face in preparing for a climate changed future. In the light of this evidence, CSOs may need to review their own preparedness, as well as the appropriateness of the services offered to the communities they serve.

Table 1: Summary of climate projections and impacts. Developed using information from CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology, Climate Change in Australia website (<http://www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au/>) [Accessed 13 May 2016].

Type of change	Timeframe/ certainty	Projections	Impacts relevant to your sector
Temperature change	Immediate changes High confidence	Average temperatures to increase by between 2.6 and 4.8°C by 2100	Increased demand for air conditioning increased risk of disease (e.g. mosquito-borne viruses).
Extremely hot days	Immediate changes High confidence	More than twice the number in some cities	Heatwaves are particularly dangerous to vulnerable groups when (a) they last for a long continuous period and (b) night-time temperatures remain high, so that there is no respite.
Fire weather	Immediate changes High confidence	Increased frequency and severity of extreme fire danger. Greatest risk in south-eastern Australia	Fire weather may not become fire. More people and property at risk.
Sea level rise	Mid century High confidence	Projected to rise by as much as 0.52 to 0.98m by 2100 bringing increased risk of coastal flooding during storms	Risks to property, infrastructure and business near the coast from erosion and inundation. Not likely to see impacts until mid-century.
Rainfall extremes	Mid century Medium confidence	Extreme rainfall events or higher rainfall intensities likely to become more common in throughout Australia, and droughts are expected to be more intense and more frequent in southern Australia	Ongoing demand, increasing in the future, for drought support and relief. Depending on the planning horizon of your organisation you may not need to worry about increased rainfall risks at present.
Storms and cyclones	Mid century Medium confidence	Fewer extreme storms but increased intensity	Unlikely to see a discernible change in storminess before the middle of the century. Existing strategies likely to be adequate at this stage



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## Adaptation:

Action to limit the negative impacts of climate change and take advantage of any opportunities

## What climate change may mean for the CSO sector

Climate change will impact on members of society depending on where they live, their existing vulnerability or ability to cope with shocks and changes, and their access to resources, including financial resources. Extreme weather events (e.g. heat waves, floods, cyclones) can impact services like electricity, telephone, transport and Internet, creating more problems. Climate change will also impact on CSOs through disruption to services, increased demand and effects on staff, stretching the capacity of the organisation to meet client demand. You may already be seeing the effects of climate change.

### Impacts on clients and client services

- **Increasing impacts of extreme heat** Urban spaces and housing in Australia are not particularly well-adapted to heat, and we have come to rely on the air conditioner to provide liveable conditions. However, power cuts are likely to become more common as the electricity supply system struggles to cope with the demand, some people may not have access to, or the financial resources to run air conditioners, and some older people may become confused in the heat and fail to operate air conditioning correctly.
- **Understanding and responding to fire risk conditions which may never translate into a fire** It is likely that wildfires will extend into areas that are unaccustomed to and unprepared for them, including peri-urban and even urban areas. This may include areas with a high proportion of immigrants who have no concept that bushfire poses a threat to them, or of how to manage that threat.
- **Existing vulnerabilities might be worsened** For example chronically ill people might suffer more during extreme heat waves, people living in low socio-economic areas that are exposed to repeated flood damage costs may be pushed into entrenched poverty, and power outages may impact on health equipment, threatening lives.
- **Increased financial pressures for clients** Insurance may become unaffordable in some areas and for some sectors of the community. Other financial impacts include the cost of rebuilding after an extreme event and loss of employment if businesses close - even temporarily.

### Direct impacts on CSOs

- **Community Service Organisations are vulnerable to climate change impacts**, including loss of premises and under-insurance, service disruption and closure, disruption to staff and governance (e.g. processing payroll) and communications (e.g. loss of telecommunications and electricity). Individual staff can also be affected (e.g. their homes may be flooded or damaged).
- **Demands on services may increase and become more complex** CSOs may have to take on a greater workload and more responsibilities during heatwaves. A rapid switch between extreme events (e.g. extreme heat wave followed immediately by bushfire) or a succession of extremes would put great pressure on both the community and the organisations that support them.

## How adaptation might help shape your response to these challenges

Adapting to climate change means making plans and where appropriate taking action now to reduce the negative impacts of climate change now and in the future and take advantage of any opportunities. In the CSO sector some of these adaptation actions include:

### Supporting clients

- **Understand who is vulnerable and why** Vulnerability to climate risk will not necessarily simply follow demographic patterns (e.g. income, age etc.) and so it will be important to work with other government agencies, research and other sectoral organisations to identify who may be more vulnerable and how vulnerability might change in response to climate change. Different strategies are likely to be required to meet the needs of different vulnerable groups.
- **Increase resilience by building community connectedness and awareness of climate change into existing activities** Well connected communities (those where individuals are engaged with and trust other community members) are generally more able to cope with extreme events. CSOs can support communities by building awareness of climate change risks and adaptations (e.g. heat wave risks and how to stay cool and well in extreme heatwaves) into core business (e.g. delivery of meals to elderly) and through community hubs such as libraries and child care centres.
- **Manage community expectations by being transparent about organisational capacity and capability** Involving community in planning and preparation will help them understand the capability of and constraints upon CSOs.
- **Educate and communicate about hazard information using different communication strategies and formats** CSOs can effectively target their communities with the right language and at the right level using multiple channels (e.g. video, social media and even theatre). Compelling stories can be built to help communicate and integrate messages with people's life and everyday experience to make them more relatable.
- **Monitor and evaluate** Indicators of success and simple cost effective ways to monitor these indicators will support CSOs to understand their effectiveness. Plans and approaches should be sufficiently flexible to enable changes to be made if the desired outcomes are not being achieved.

### Building organisational resilience

- **Collaborate to maximise limited resources** Coordination and common strategies among CSOs can help maximise limited resources.
- **Advocate to government the needs of disadvantaged people and CSOs** in national, state and local adaptation policy and planning to build support.

This sector brief was developed drawing on the broad body of new adaptation research commissioned by NCCARF. The following reports and factsheets were relied on to develop this sector brief:

- Pathways to climate adapted and healthy low income housing
- Heat-Ready: Heatwave awareness, preparedness and adaptive capacity in aged care facilities in three Australian states: New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia
- Extreme heat and climate change: Adaptation in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- Adapting the community sector for climate extremes: Extreme weather, climate change & the community sector – Risks and adaptations
- Living with Climate Change: Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation Factsheets for Australia: Human Health
- Impact of climate change on disadvantaged groups: issues and interventions.
- A spatial vulnerability analysis of urban populations during extreme heat events in Australian capital cities
- A framework for adaptation of Australian households to heat waves.

All documents are available for download at: [www.nccarf.edu.au/adaptation-library](http://www.nccarf.edu.au/adaptation-library)

For more synthesis reports visit: [www.nccarf.edu.au/synthesis](http://www.nccarf.edu.au/synthesis)

