

Summary brief 5:

Co-designing priorities and actions for climate justice

Identifying shared priorities and mobilising collective action requires an innovative, systems approach to ensure that the actions are as diverse as the region itself.

Tackling climate injustice calls for an approach that draws on local knowledge and experience, strengthens local capacity and capability, while also transforming the wider systems within which this activity operates.¹ This multi-pronged approach is necessary to ensure that collective actions represent the diversity, needs, strengths, and vulnerabilities of community health and community service organisations (CHCSOs) and the communities with whom they work.

This brief outlines a range of priorities and calls to action collectively determined by CHCSOs and related organisations working in the west of Melbourne. These were gathered using a group model building process that guided participants to collectively form a shared understanding of the drivers of a complex problem. A causal loop diagram, or systems map, was developed by the group as a tool to visualise these drivers and the feedback loops that connect them to identify opportunities for action.

Reflecting the action orientation of this plan, two group model building workshops and an action forum were held between March and May 2022. The two workshops aimed to explore a key issue identified through the preceding research: *How can our organisations (the health and community services sector) collectively strengthen capacity to mobilise and support climate justice in the west of Melbourne?* A summary of the process, as well as prioritised actions identified through the action forum is outlined in **Figure 5.1**. Note that these priorities reflect those of the workshop participants, and should be considered a starting point to engage a wider range of organisations.

Visualising collective priorities

Facilitated by Deakin University's Global Obesity Centre, two online workshops invited contributors to develop a causal loop diagram to identify the evolving drivers of climate (in)justice. Participants were invited to reflect on the specific climate impacts, communities, and health determinants relevant to climate justice in the west (**Figure 5.2**). The seven nodes in the diagram below (shown as coloured boxes) represent these factors. Arrows between the factors illustrate the ways that they interact with one another. For example, when organisational leadership increases, so too does organisational ownership of climate justice (solid arrow). As well, when organisational leadership increases, the impacts of climate change on staff decrease (dotted arrow).

The third event and culminating event, an action forum, brought more than 30 organisations together in person to brainstorm, prioritise, and share action ideas based on the causal map developed in the previous workshops. Against the seven priority factors influencing collective capacity, participants mapped their understanding of where work is currently happening, where it is important to act, and where there is power to act (**Table 5.1**).

Together, the group then prioritised 45 action ideas, with a further 21 ideas collected at the end of the session. These 66 ideas were then grouped into 8 types of action areas defined by the Deakin facilitators, with participants invited to sign up to areas that aligned with their expertise, interest, and capacity (**Table 5.2**). The full range of actions identified by participants can be found in **Appendix 3**.

5: Co-designing priorities and actions

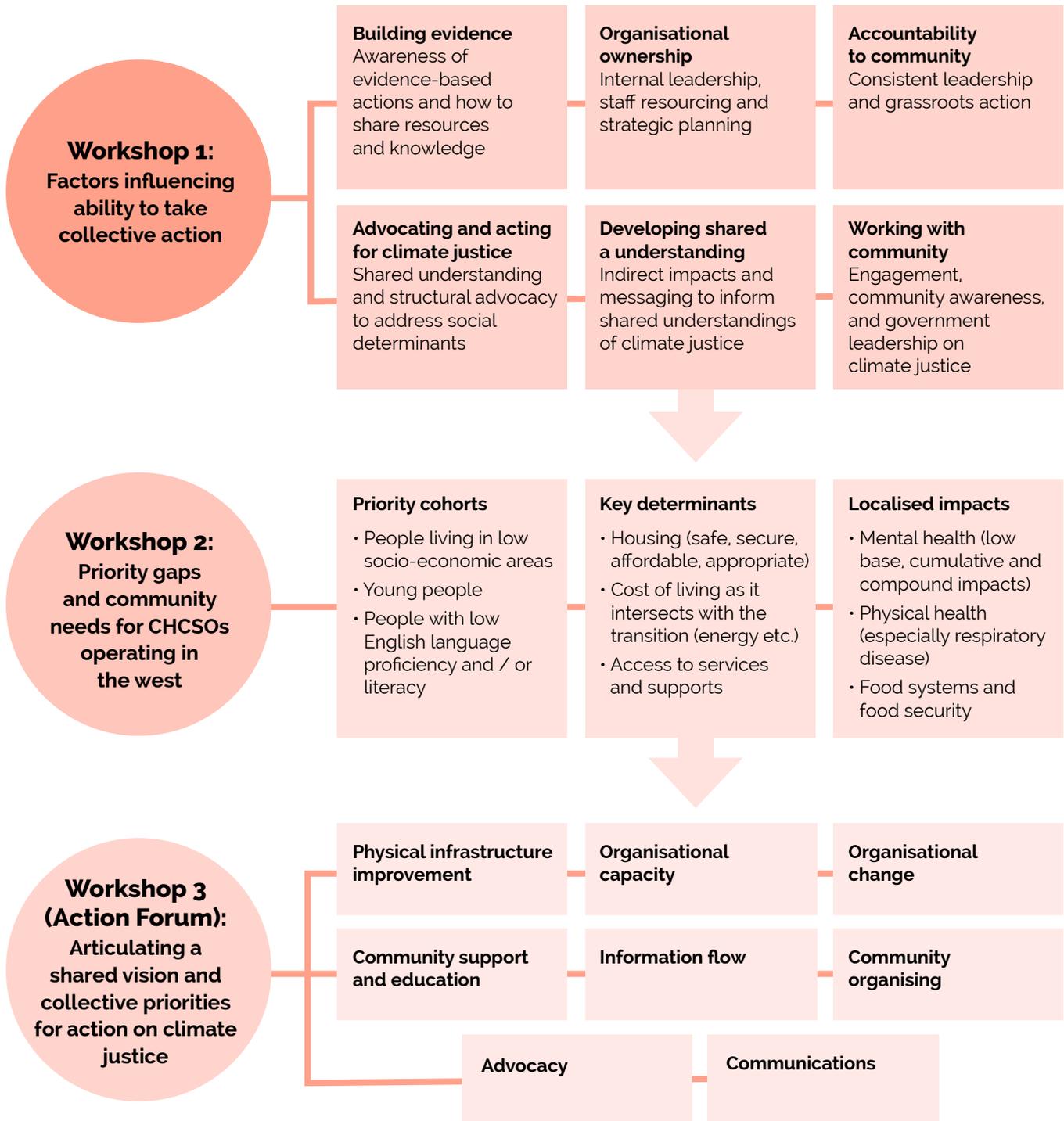


Figure 5.1 Process to develop shared priorities for collaborative action.

5: Co-designing priorities and actions

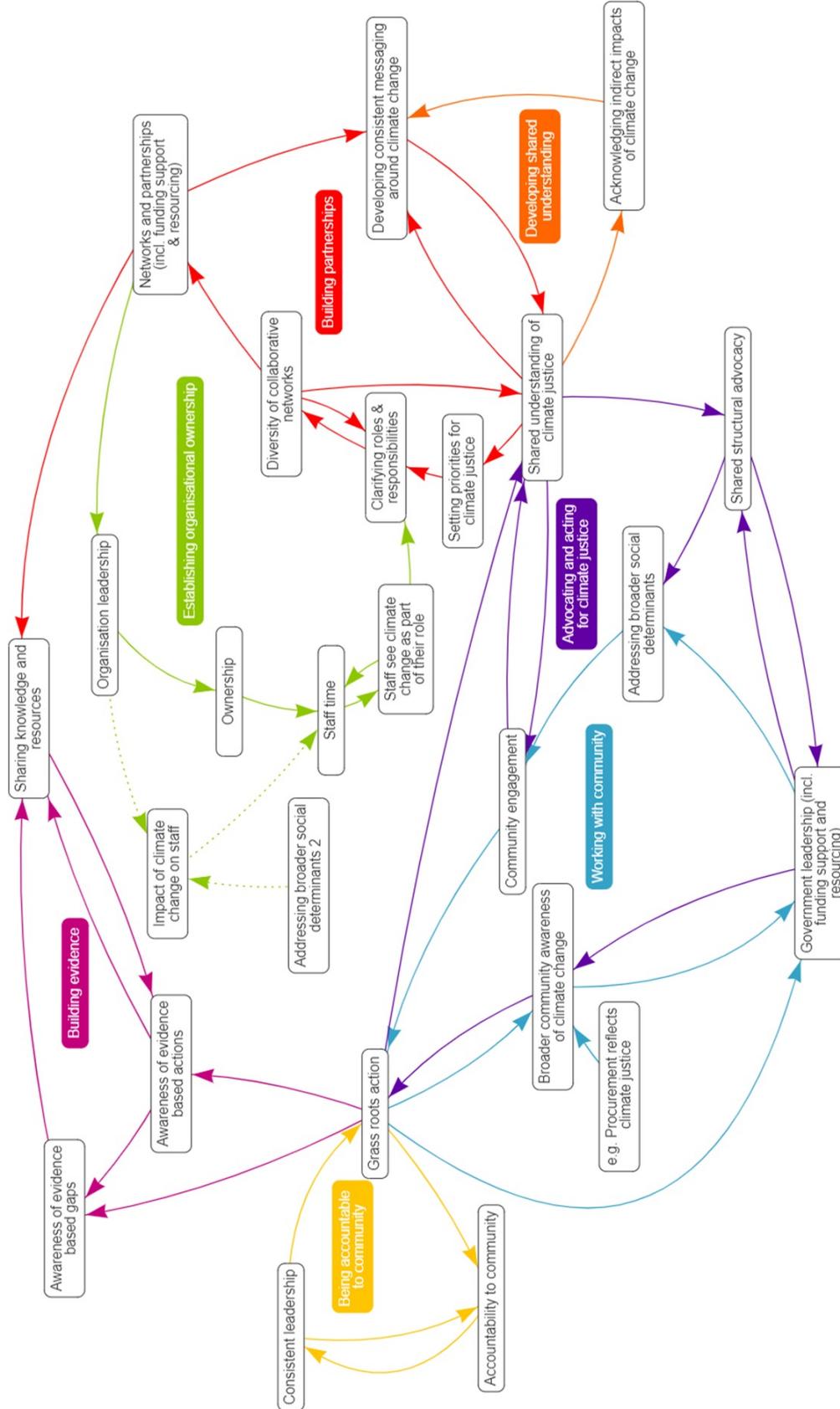


Figure 5.2. Causal loop diagram of factors influencing ability to take collective action. Source: Collective illustration facilitated through Deakin University's **STICKE2 systems mapping application**.

5: Co-designing priorities and actions

Table 5.1 Summary of participants' perceptions of where work on climate justice is happening, where it is important to act and there is power to act. Participants at the action forum annotated the causal loop diagram according to their understandings of current climate justice activities in the region. These responses were then collated to show where the group perceived the greatest activity (dark green) through to the least activity (dark orange). Blank spaces indicate areas where no response was recorded.

Source: Brown, Poorter and Walker (2022, p. 16).

Factor	Description	Current work	Importance to act	Power to act
Advocating and acting for climate justice	Addressing broader social determinants	Dark Green	Light Green	White
	Government leadership (incl. funding support and resourcing)	White	Light Orange	Light Orange
	Shared structural advocacy	Light Orange	Light Orange	Light Orange
Being accountable to community	Accountability to community	Light Orange	Light Orange	White
Building evidence	Awareness of evidence-based actions	White	White	White
	Awareness of evidence-based gaps	Light Green	White	Light Green
	Sharing knowledge and resources	Light Orange	White	Light Orange
Building partnerships	Diversity of collaborative networks	Dark Green	Light Orange	Light Orange
	Networks and partnerships (incl. funding support & resourcing)	Light Orange	Light Orange	White
Developing shared understanding	Acknowledging indirect impacts of climate change	Light Orange	White	Light Green
	Consistent messaging around climate change	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green
	Shared understanding of climate justice	White	White	Light Orange
Establishing organisational ownership	Impact of climate change on staff	White	White	Light Orange
	Organisation leadership	Light Orange	Light Orange	White
	Ownership	Dark Green	Light Orange	White
	Staff see climate change as part of their role	Light Orange	White	Light Orange
	Staff time	Light Orange	White	Light Orange
Working with community	Broader community awareness of climate change	Dark Green	White	Light Orange
	Community engagement	Light Orange	Light Orange	Light Green
	Procurement reflects climate justice	White	White	Light Orange
	Grassroots action	Light Orange	Light Green	White

5: Co-designing priorities and actions

Table 5.2 Summary of action areas and sign-ups from the 33 participating organisations at the action forum based on their expertise, interest, and capacity. Source: Brown, Poorter and Walker (2022, p. 16).

Action area	Sign-ups	Interested organisations – by type
Community organising	9	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Peak bodies Community service organisations Community health organisations Funding bodies
Communications	8	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Peak bodies Local government State government agencies Community health organisations
Community support and education	8	Local Government Funding bodies State government agencies Water Authority
Organisational capacity	5	Community service organisations Funding bodies Water Authority State Government agencies
Physical infrastructure improvement	5	Local Government Peak bodies Water Authority Community health organisations
Advocacy	4	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation State Government agencies Community health organisations Funding bodies
Information flow	3	Community service organisations State Government agencies
Organisational change	2	Local Government State Government agencies

5: Co-designing priorities and actions

Leverage points for action

What emerges from this process is that there are clear priorities where organisations feel they can best drive collaborative action – both in terms of short-term goals and building momentum for bigger actions. This has a few implications for collaborative work on climate justice.

First, there is a question of quality. That is, in being clear exactly how that action contributes to systemic change. Advocacy, for example, was a source of frustration for many CHCSOs, with years-long reporting on community and organisational need not reflected in budgeting asks. This was reflected in the 'action' orientation of many to drive change from the grassroots level up.

Second, there is a need to make explicit how actions might complement or reinforce each other. Few organisations had detailed policies and procedures around climate justice – or emphasised this as a priority – yet the need for capacity strengthening, organisational leadership and resourcing was one of the shared priorities for action.

Finally, it is important to consider which actions might allow for the 'quick wins' necessary to make larger actions possible. Action areas with more sign-ups, such as community organising, or with already engaged and highly connected organisations, such as neighbourhood houses and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, are a strong starting point. This is due to the depth of their relationships in the community, the clarity of their asks in relation to changing community needs, and the ability of their organisations to respond to these priorities.

Key questions to be explored further in the next phases of collaboration include:

- In taking a systemic approach, where might it be more effective to act?
- Which elements of the climate justice problem are we addressing? Which have the greatest opportunity for leverage?
- What does the evidence tell us about the effectiveness of this action area?
- To what extent is the group committed and resourced to acting in this area?²

5: Co-designing priorities and actions

Findings and emerging opportunities

This brief captures one way in which a coalition of organisations was able to identify and prioritise actions using a group model building process. This process enabled organisations to visualise a range of factors that they perceived or understood to be influencing their ability to act on climate justice.

As highlighted in the mapping exercise and through the process of identifying shared priorities, a number of key findings and opportunities for action emerged:

- **The need to address the drivers of risk and vulnerability** – Without addressing the social determinants of health that affect local communities, climate justice is not possible. Mobilising climate justice requires addressing equity across determinants of health and wellbeing for individuals and communities, as well as building the capacity of organisations to support communities including during times of crisis.
- **The need to learn from and involve diverse knowledge and experiences** – Developing a shared understanding of intersections between 'climate change' and 'health and wellbeing' was identified as needing further work. This means ensuring a diverse and inclusive process so that a wide range of communities and organisations have the ability to contribute to these understandings. This includes thinking about how to develop different governance models and strategies to engage under-represented groups.
- **The need for evidence-based and accountable actions** – Action on climate change must be evidence-led and transparent. This requires CHCSOs and the community alike to have the resources and ability to access funding, training and information to enable them to measure and track the impacts of their activities.
- **Lead by example** – Failure to embed strategies and actions on climate change and responses within operational and budgeting processes will mean that climate justice issues are not integrated into core business. In order to lead by example, organisations need to be resourced to enable their staff to consider climate change within their roles and responsibilities.
- **Strengthening connections between organisations and services** – CHCSOs do not work in isolation and as community need grows, so too does the importance of clear and reliable referral pathways for support. In turn, this requires evidence to map and communicate this institutional knowledge and social infrastructure.
- **Value the role of the community sector in building resilient communities** – Now more than ever, CHCSOs play a critical role in responding to the intersecting challenges of extreme weather, health and wellbeing, and cost-of-living pressures. Funding and governance arrangements should reflect the value of this, particularly for frontline staff who often act as intermediaries between the community and government.

5: Co-designing priorities and actions

Notes

¹ VCOSS, *A Climate of Fairness: Making Victoria's Climate Change Transition Fair & Equitable* (Melbourne, 2019), 43-47. <https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/A-Climate-of-Fairness-2019-with-footnotes-web.pdf>.

² Andrew Brown, Jaimie Poorter and Troy Walker, *Mobilising Climate Just and Resilient Communities in Melbourne's West Report: Workshops & Action Forum* (Melbourne: Deakin University, 2022), 14.

For further information:

Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places: <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/centre-for-just-places/>

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