

# Lessons in Resilience Final Report

March 2026

Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places



Jesuit  
Social Services  
Building a Just Society



# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which this project took place.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and extend this acknowledgement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who continue to care for Country, community, and culture.

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## Project acknowledgements

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# Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. For 49 years, we have accompanied the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in a range of areas including: migration and resettlement; justice and crime prevention; mental health and wellbeing; education, training and employment; gender justice; and ecological and climate justice. Our work spans Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

## About Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places

The Centre for Just Places was established by Jesuit Social Services in early 2021 with support from the Gandel Foundation and the Victorian Government to enable and support place-based approaches. Through our research, advocacy and practice, the Centre unlocks the relationship between social, environmental and economic justice. Our mission is to enable strong and resilient communities through three main areas of work:

- **Working in place** – our practice in Victoria, New South Wales and Northern Territory – we deliver a range of place-based initiatives to support community development, build capacity and provide flexible responses to community needs.
- **Enabling climate justice** – we partner with community service organisations, communities, and governments to shift systems, build local climate resilience and adaptive capacity.
- **Supporting strong, healthy, and equitable communities** – building on more than 25 years of research into locational disadvantage with *Dropping off the Edge*, we work with communities to know where people are struggling, to understand what is contributing to that struggle and how we can collectively enable communities to flourish.





## Executive summary

*Lessons in Resilience* examines how community service and health organisations (CSHOs) in Melbourne’s west adapted to climate-related shocks and the COVID-19 pandemic between 2019 and 2025. The report consolidates lessons from a period marked by extreme weather events, flooding, heatwaves, and prolonged health emergencies. Drawing on six in-depth case studies, it identifies what enabled effective action, what constrained responses, and what is needed to strengthen community and organisational resilience as climate risks intensify.

### Why this report matters

CSHOs played a pivotal role during recent crises, often acting as first responders for communities experiencing structural and systemic disadvantage. Yet much of the learning from these responses has not been systematically captured. As climate change accelerates, failing to embed these local lessons risks continued reactive, short-term approaches that leave structurally disadvantaged communities at heightened risk. This report addresses that gap by documenting what worked, why it worked, and how climate resilience efforts can be strengthened and supported across the region.

### How the research was conducted

The project used a qualitative, case-study methodology involving interviews with leaders, operational teams, and frontline workers from six CSHOs. Organisational documents and contextual evidence were reviewed to deepen insights. Analysis was guided by the Community Capitals Framework, examining how human, social, cultural, financial, political, built, and natural capitals shaped organisational responses and adaptive capacity.

## What the research found

Five cross-cutting themes emerged through this research:

### 1. Community-led, place-based approaches

Grounding responses in local knowledge and lived experience enabled culturally relevant, trusted and flexible action. Bicultural workers, local leaders and grassroots networks strengthened engagement, reduced access barriers, and ensured responses were meaningful to diverse communities.

### 2. Justice, equity and inclusion

Organisations that applied intersectional, justice-centred approaches were better able to reach those disproportionately impacted by climate and health crises. Embedding lived experience and cultural safety was essential to designing equitable and accessible programs.

### 3. Trusted relationships and cross-sector partnerships

Strong social capital, including trusted relationships with communities, local government, health services, and partner organisations, was one of the most important enablers of effective responses.

Collaboration supported rapid mobilisation, shared learning, and sustained impact. Consistent with the existing literature and findings of the evidence review, this theme reinforces the central role of social capital in enabling effective responses and building resilience.

### 4. Organisational learning and adaptability

Structured reflection, documentation of lessons, and leadership support for adaptation enabled organisations to move from reactive crisis responses to forward-looking preparedness. Flexible funding and internal processes strengthened resilience and improved continuity through change.

### 5. Innovation and solutions-focused practice

Organisations developed new approaches, reframed engagement, and adapted existing frameworks to address emerging challenges. Evidence-informed advocacy and community-led innovation helped influence systems, improve service design, and respond to complex risks.



## What enables resilience

The insights from key themes not only highlight what effective practice looks like, but also point to the conditions that underpin climate resilience in Melbourne's west. Across the case studies, six conditions emerged as foundational to enabling effective climate and community resilience:

- Community-led, place-based approaches
- Justice-centred community engagement that addresses structural inequity
- Investment in social capital and cross-sectoral collaboration
- Embedding learning into everyday practice
- Systems that enable adaptive practice
- Evidence-informed action and advocacy

## Recommendations: What needs to happen next

Strengthening resilience in Melbourne's west requires coordinated regional action, structural reform, and long-term investment.

### For resilience practitioners in community service and health organisations

- Embed organisational learning in structures and culture.
- Use place-based evidence and lived experience to guide action.
- Integrate social determinants and climate justice into resilience planning.

### For organisational leaders and decision-makers in community service and health organisations

- Make resilience a core strategic commitment.
- Foster an adaptive, learning-oriented culture.
- Advocate for enabling policy, funding, and governance settings.
- Invest in workforce capability, wellbeing, and lived-experience expertise.

### For government

- Enable locally adaptable funding and program models.
- Align emergency management, public health, and climate adaptation systems.
- Shift accountability toward long-term, community-defined outcomes.

### For funders

- Provide flexible, multi-year funding for preparedness and resilience - not only crises.
- Resource collaboration and relationship-building as core infrastructure.
- Invest in culturally safe practice and lived-experience leadership.

## Conclusion

Resilience in Melbourne's west depends on the interplay of people, systems, place, and power. Effective climate resilience is community-led, justice and equity-centred, relationship-based, and supported by organisations that learn and adapt. To meet escalating climate risks, governments, funders, organisations, and communities must work collectively to address structural inequities, embed learning, and build the enabling conditions for long-term resilience. Acting on these findings will support Melbourne's west, not only to withstand future shocks, but to foster wellbeing, inclusion, and climate justice for generations to come.



## Background

*Lessons in Resilience* was a collaborative, cross-sector project focused on strengthening community resilience and advancing just adaptation and health equity across Melbourne's west. The project brought together a coalition of community service organisations, health organisations, peak bodies, local government, and research institutions. It was led by Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places (CJP), in partnership with Wyndham City Council and the Western Public Health Unit, and supported by GenWest, Network West, cohealth, Australian Multicultural Community Services, Victorian Council of Social Service, and Victoria University.

This project built on earlier CJP initiatives, including *Mobilising Climate Just and Resilient Communities in Melbourne's West* and *Climate Resilient Neighbourhoods*, to enhance the capacity of local organisations to prepare for and respond to shocks and stressors, including those driven by climate change. It recognises that many of the region's communities already face intersecting forms of disadvantage, and that climate-related impacts can further entrench inequity unless met with coordinated, informed, and equitable responses.

A key focus of the project was the development and analysis of case studies documenting how community service and health organisations

adapted their services and operations to meet community needs during crises between 2019 and 2025, including extreme weather events (such as floods and heatwaves) and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the project undertook a desktop review of existing local research, evaluations, and inquiries to consolidate knowledge and identify gaps. Findings from the [Evidence Review](#) have also been published in a separate report. Insights generated through both the case studies and the review informed practical recommendations for strengthening climate change resilience across the Melbourne's west.



## Rationale

*Lessons in Resilience* builds on this earlier work that highlighted strong adaptive capacity across the region and community sector, but also revealed a critical gap: the lessons gained through COVID-19, heatwaves, floods, storms, and other shocks were not being systematically captured, shared, or embedded into future planning.

CSHOs in Melbourne's west have consistently identified the need for a structured way to translate lived experience, organisational learning and innovation, and frontline knowledge into more resilient models of care and service delivery. Without this, valuable insights risked being lost, and opportunities to strengthen preparedness, particularly for communities experiencing structural and systemic disadvantage, remained under realised.

The *Lessons in Resilience* project was established to document how CSHOs adapted during recent shocks and stressors, and to elevate the expertise

already present within the community sector. The project recognises that climate change is intensifying existing inequities, shaping who is most exposed to harm and who has access to resources, services, and decision-making power.

Effective climate resilience requires coordinated, cross sectoral action grounded in local knowledge and community leadership. *Lessons in Resilience* centres these perspectives to inform more just, place-based, and community-led approaches to preparing for, and responding to, the accelerating and intensifying impacts of climate change.



# Climate risk, inequity, and role of community service and health organisations in Melbourne's west

Melbourne's west, comprising the local government areas of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton and Wyndham, is a rapidly growing region facing intensifying climate risks alongside longstanding structural inequities. These intersecting pressures shape how communities experience climate impacts and the capacity of CSHOs to respond.

Melbourne's western suburbs are among the fastest-growing areas in Victoria, and experiences lower average rainfall, resulting in drier conditions and higher daytime temperatures than many parts of Melbourne. Rapid population growth and urban development have increased environmental pressures, contributing to higher levels of pollution, reduced vegetation cover and significant urban heat.<sup>1</sup> These conditions heighten the risk of heat stress and other climate-related health impacts, particularly in areas with limited green space and cooling infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past decade, rapid population growth and development have also driven significant shifts in the socio-demographic profile of Melbourne's


west. Growth areas in the local government areas of Brimbank, Melton and Wyndham face particularly high exposure to extreme heat, compounded by housing quality, urban design and socioeconomic factors that can limit people's ability to remain safe during heatwaves.<sup>3</sup> These vulnerabilities intersect with broader health and social risks, which are projected to intensify as temperatures rise and climate hazards such as flooding, fire risk, and poor air quality become more frequent and severe. According to the *Dropping off the Edge 2021* report, parts of Melbourne's west are also among the most disadvantaged areas in Victoria, compounding the risks and challenges associated with climate change.<sup>4</sup>

1 Greening the West n.d.  
2 Infrastructure Victoria 2020  
3 Dunn et al. 2022, 27.  
4 Tanton et al. 2021, 90.






Figure 1: Map of the index of disadvantage in the west of Melbourne



**LEGEND**

 Inadequate data

**Index Value 2021**

-  Q1 ( the most disadvantage)
-  Q2
-  Q3
-  Q4
-  Q5 ( the least disadvantage)

Flooding and storm surge present additional and growing risks. Residential land across the region has relatively high exposure to flood and storm surge events. Since 2009 Melbourne's west has experienced flooding or major storm events in most years, and climate projections indicate that the frequency and intensity of these events will continue to increase.<sup>5</sup> The 2022 Maribyrnong floods illustrate the scale and severity of these risks in practice.

For CSHOs and the communities they support, these intersecting climate and social pressures have significant implications. CSHOs are increasingly required to respond to compounding and cascading events, such as extreme heat occurring alongside rising cost-of-living pressures, which intensify demand for services while constraining both individual and organisational capacity to cope. These conditions affect organisations' ability to meet existing needs and to plan for future service demand in a context of ongoing uncertainty.

The consequences for health and wellbeing outcomes are substantial. Melbourne's west is a region that is rapidly growing and diversifying, yet demand for adequate infrastructure, services, and supports continues to outpace provision. As climate-related risks intensify, CSHOs are often required to fill systemic gaps, responding not only to immediate crisis but also to longer-term health, social, and economic stressors. This places sustained pressure on organisations, their workforce, and the broader service system.

Understanding how CSHOs have navigated climate-related events and other crises in recent years provides critical insight into what enables effective, just, and place-based responses to the impacts of climate change and disasters. It also highlights the importance of coordinated, cross-sectoral approaches that recognise the expertise of community organisations and support them through appropriate resourcing, partnerships, and policy settings. Grounding climate resilience in local knowledge and evidence is essential to strengthening responses that are equitable, sustainable, and responsive to local contexts.

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5 Infrastructure Victoria 2020, 113.



## Key concepts

This report draws on several core concepts including resilience, adaptation, and climate justice, that underpin the analysis of case studies and findings. These terms are widely used across climate, disaster, and community sector contexts, often without attention to power, history, or structural inequality; here they are used in ways that foreground justice, place and lived experience. Establishing a shared conceptual foundation is therefore essential for understanding how they are used throughout this report.

### Resilience

In this report, resilience refers to the capacity of people, organisations, and communities to anticipate, respond to, and recover from adverse events while maintaining wellbeing over time. Resilience is understood as a dynamic, relational, and systemic process, shaped by social, cultural, organisational, and structural conditions.<sup>6</sup>

Resilience does not imply that individuals or communities should cope without support. It depends on equitable access to resources, services, information, decision-making power and supportive institutions that enable effective responses to climate-related shocks and stressors.

Crucially, resilience is not limited to coping or “bouncing back”. In many contexts, returning to pre-existing conditions would mean returning to inequity. For this reason, resilience is understood to include transformational dimensions: the capacity to address the underlying drivers of vulnerability and reshape the systems that produce risk. Transformational resilience involves shifting policies, structures and resource flows so that communities are not repeatedly exposed to harm.<sup>7</sup> It aligns closely with climate justice by centring community leadership, redistributing power and enabling long-term structural change.

6 Cutter, 2016.

7 IPCC, 2022; Pelling, 2011.

## Climate resilience

Climate resilience describes the ability of communities, organisations and systems to anticipate, prepare for, respond to and adapt to both acute climate hazards (such as heatwaves, floods and storms) and long-term climatic shifts. In this report, climate resilience is understood as a socially and structurally produced condition, influenced by intersecting factors such as housing, health, income, service access, and governance.<sup>8</sup>

Climate impacts are not experienced evenly. Structural inequities shape who is most exposed to climate hazards, who has access to safe housing and essential services, and who has the financial and social resources to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related events. These conditions reflect broader systems and histories, not individual choices, and directly constrain climate resilience.

## Community resilience

Community resilience refers to the collective capacity of communities to support one another, mobilise local knowledge and access resources in ways that strengthen wellbeing, reduce vulnerability and enable adaptation over time.<sup>9</sup> It is grounded in relationships, trust, local and cultural knowledge, networks, including those maintained by CSHOs.

In this report, community resilience is not framed as something communities are solely responsible for building or maintaining. It is enabled or constrained by the availability of services and infrastructure, the stability and flexibility of funding, and governance models, and policy and planning systems that either include or exclude communities from meaningful decision-making.

## Organisational resilience

Organisational resilience refers to the ability of organisations to maintain and adapt their services, workforce, and ways of working in response to disasters and long-term impacts of climate change, while continuing to meet the needs of the communities they serve.<sup>10</sup> For CSHOs, organisational resilience includes the capacity to respond flexibly to changing conditions, support staff wellbeing, and collaborate with partners across sectors.

## Climate change adaptation

Adaptation describes a process of adjusting to actual or anticipated climate change impacts.<sup>11</sup> In the context of this report, adaptation includes adjustments to service and funding models, operational processes, partnerships, and modes of engagement with communities. Adaptation is understood as an ongoing process rather than a one-off response. Adaptation and adapted responses described in this report are the ones that emerged during crises such as COVID-19 or extreme weather events and continue to influence how organisations operate.

## Climate justice

Climate justice is an approach that recognises climate change as not only an environmental issue but a profound social justice issue. It acknowledges the harms caused by climate change are unevenly distributed, with the most severe impacts affecting communities already experiencing entrenched social, economic, cultural, and health inequities.<sup>12</sup> Climate justice shifts attention to the underlying structural conditions, including colonisation, gender inequality, racism, poverty, housing and planning systems, that shape exposure to climate risk and unfairly constrain people's ability to prepare, respond and recover. These intersecting pressures shape how communities experience climate impacts and the capacity of CSHOs to respond.

8 IPCC, 2022.

9 Norris et al., 2007; Plough et al., 2013.

10 Mees, McMurray; Chhetri 2016, 39.

11 Dunn et al. 2022, 18.

12 Dunn et al. 2022,19.

# Methodology

*Lessons in Resilience* employed a qualitative, purposive sampling case study–based approach to examine how CSHOs in Melbourne’s west adapted to extreme weather events and the COVID-19 pandemic between 2019 and 2025. Case studies were selected to enable deep, context-specific analysis of organisational responses to intersecting climate, health and social shocks and stressors. This approach foregrounds organisational expertise, institutional learning, and practice-based responses that are often obscured in quantitative datasets or high-level reporting.

This report is designed to be read alongside the companion evidence review,<sup>13</sup> which synthesises existing literature on resilience-building initiatives led by or involving CSHOs in Melbourne’s west. Together, these documents provide an empirically grounded and evidence-informed foundation for understanding resilience in the region.

## Case study selection

Six CSHOs were invited to participate through purposive sampling. Selection was informed by the organisations who demonstrated engagement with climate- and health-related shocks and stressors and knowledge of their contributions to community resilience.

Key considerations in the selection of case studies included demonstration of:

- Adaptation of services and operations in response to acute shocks and chronic stressors
- Use of organisational knowledge, relationships, and social infrastructure to strengthen community and climate resilience
- Place-focused or place-based approaches that reflect local needs and strengths, including cross-sector collaboration
- Innovation or non-traditional service models
- A focus on health and social equity, and targeted support for systemically disadvantaged communities

The case studies are not intended to represent the full spectrum of CSHO experiences. Rather, they provide illustrative examples that surface transferable lessons and insights for future resilience and adaptation efforts.

## Data collection

Data collection combined desktop review and semi-structured interviews with staff across leadership, operational, and frontline roles. Interview guides were tailored to each organisation, focusing on either specific responses to extreme weather events or broader organisational trajectories in climate and community resilience. Relevant organisational documents, project materials, websites, and reports were reviewed to contextualise and triangulate interview findings.

Data collection centred on:

- Changes to service delivery, operations, and organisational practices
- Factors that supported adaptation and resilience
- Barriers and constraints
- Lessons learned and ongoing impacts

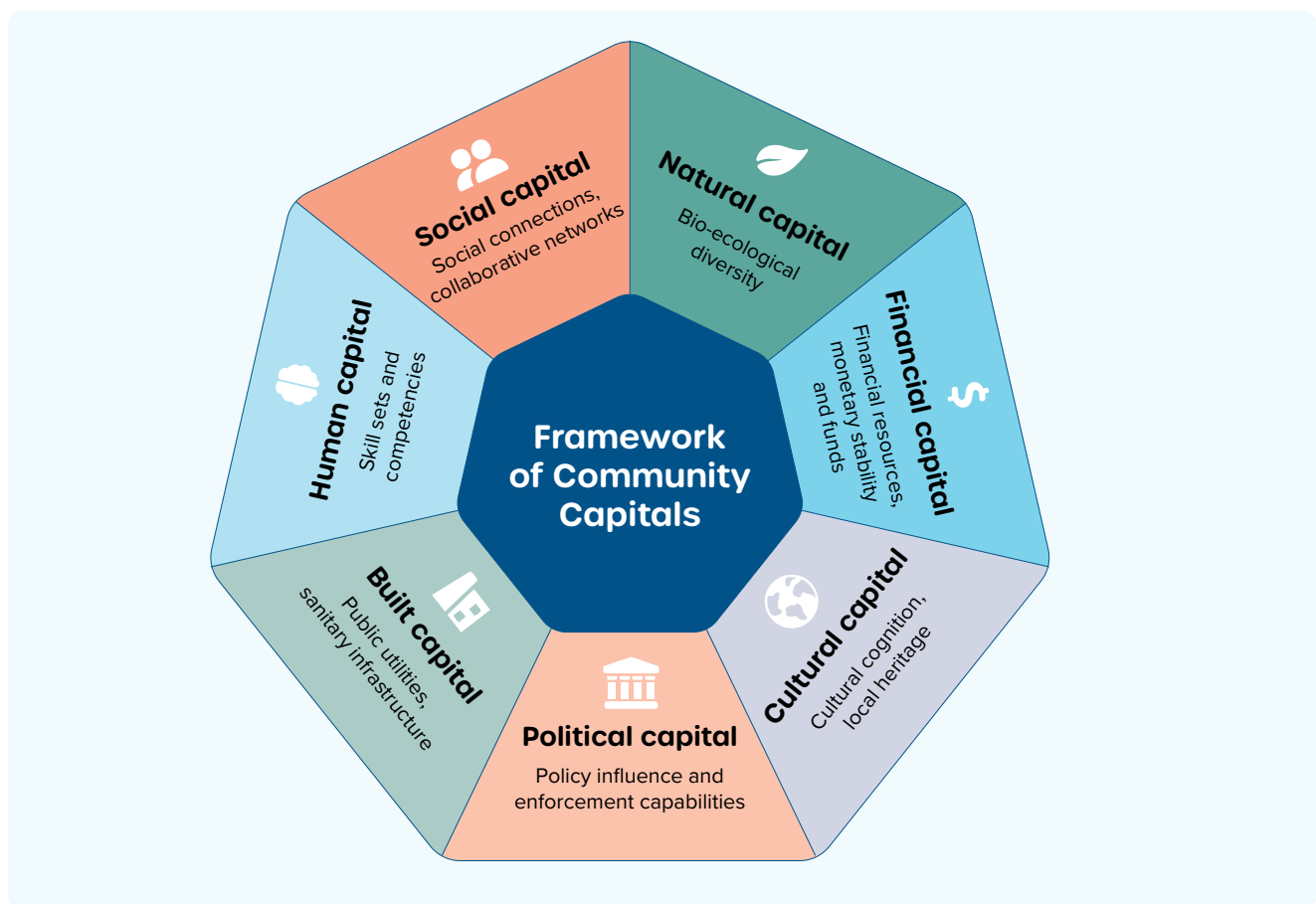
## Analytical framework: Community Capitals Framework

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF)<sup>14</sup> was used as the primary analytical lens. The CCF offers a place-based and equity-focused approach to understanding resilience by recognising how different forms of capital interact and shape organisational and community capacity during and after crises.

The framework identifies seven forms of capital:

- 1. Human capital:** skills, knowledge, education, and leadership capacity
- 2. Social capital:** relationships, trust, networks, and partnerships
- 3. Financial capital:** funding, monetary resources and financial stability
- 4. Built capital:** physical infrastructure, facilities, and physical assets
- 5. Political capital:** access to power and decision-making, and ability to influence and advocate
- 6. Cultural capital:** values, cultural knowledge, and ways of working
- 7. Natural capital:** environmental conditions and natural resources

Figure 2: Framework of community capitals adapted from Emery and Flora (2006)



14 Emery and Flora 2006

In this project, the CCF was adapted to examine how capitals were mobilised, constrained, or transformed through organisational responses. Rather than treating the capitals as discrete categories, analysis focused on their interactions and how they collectively shaped resilience outcomes.

The analysis also incorporated key dimensions of resilience, including:

- Learning and adaptation
- Strategic or forward thinking
- Community leadership and organisation
- Ability to leverage networks and external support
- Self-organisation and innovation
- Managing ongoing or compounding stressors

## Data analysis

Interview transcripts and case study materials were analysed thematically, guided by CCF.

The analysis sought to:

- Identify which forms of capital were most critical during response
- Examine how organisations drew on existing strengths or developed new capacities
- Surface common patterns, challenges, and enablers across cases.

A cross-case analysis was then conducted to identify shared themes and insights, which informed the findings and implications presented in subsequent sections of the report.



## Case studies: Resilience in practice

Six case studies were selected to illustrate how organisations in Melbourne’s west responded to and adapted during recent shocks and stressors, including health- and climate-related events. Together, they showcase the strengths, knowledge, and expertise within the community sector – capacities that are essential to responding to complex, place-based challenges arising from disasters and the long-term impacts of climate change. The case studies reflect a diverse range of organisations, including community health, women’s health, community recovery groups, neighbourhood houses, and councils operating across the region.



Source: cohealth

## CASE STUDY 1

# Transforming crisis response into community resilience: cohealth's approach to advancing health and social equity for communities in Melbourne's west

 SOCIAL CAPITAL

 HUMAN CAPITAL

 CULTURAL CAPITAL

[cohealth](#), one of Victoria's largest community health organisations, led a rapid and adaptive COVID-19 pandemic response across Melbourne's west between 2020 and 2022. Working in areas of high social disadvantage, cohealth developed an approach that moved beyond clinical service delivery to one that was deeply embedded in community relationships, cultural understanding, and local capacity. What began as an emergency health response has since informed more enduring ways of working that strengthen both community and organisational capacity to respond to future public health, social, and environmental challenges.

During the height of the pandemic, Melbourne's west experienced some of the state's most severe impacts, including strict lockdowns in public housing towers. Early government-led testing and containment measures often failed to connect with residents, many of whom faced language barriers, limited access to information, and deep mistrust of government. These experiences revealed the limits of top-down approaches in diverse and complex community settings.

Drawing on established relationships and local knowledge, cohealth developed a tailored and locally responsive model that prioritised communication, trust and cultural safety. Through the *High-Risk Accommodation Response (HRAR)* program, funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the organisation embedded bicultural and lived-experience workers, known

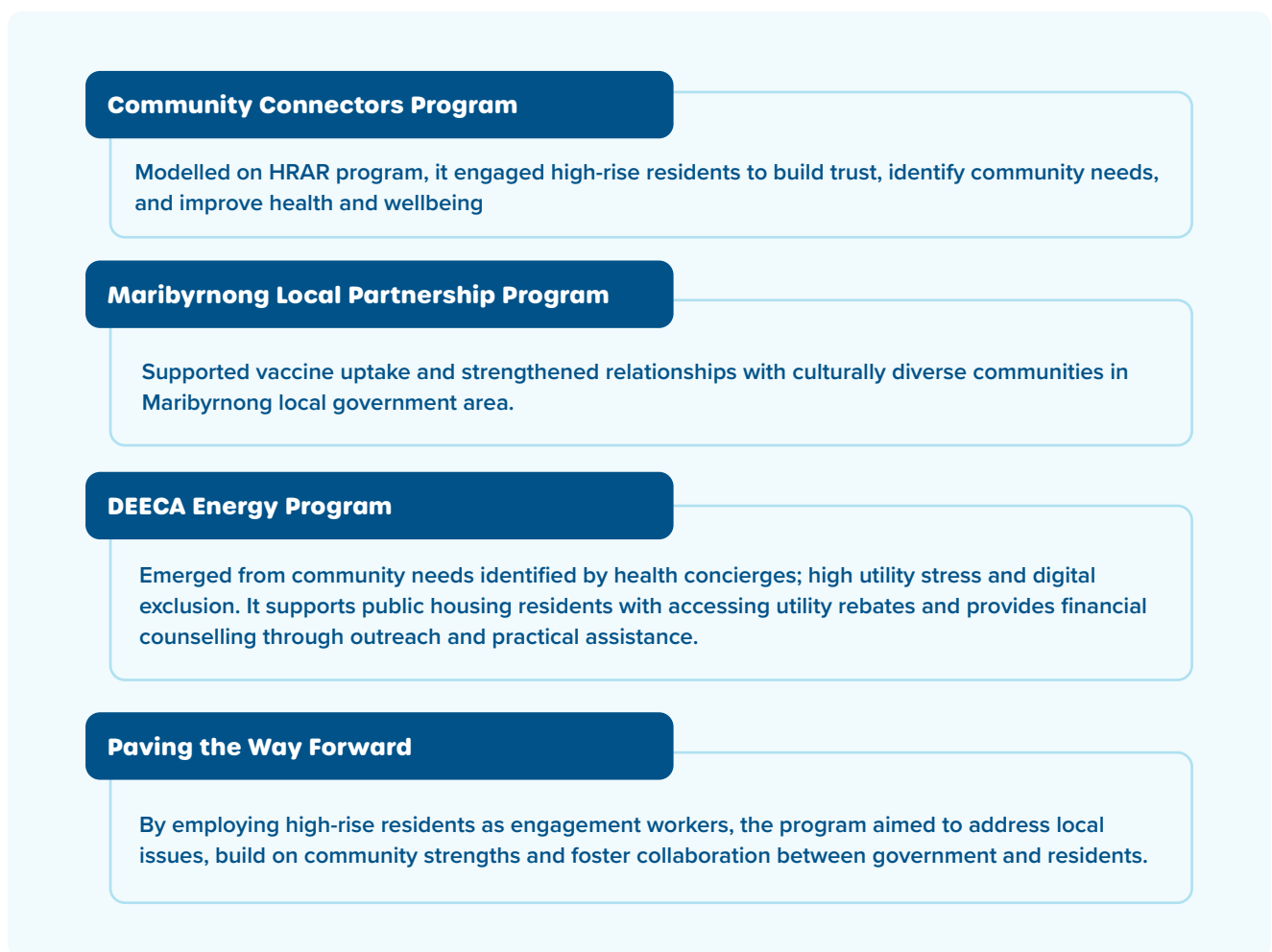
as Health Concierges, within response teams to engage directly with residents in ways that were meaningful and respectful. Health information was delivered in-language; community concerns were heard and acted upon; and support extended beyond testing and vaccination to include access to food, wellbeing checks, and coordinated care.

*"Health concierges were there to, sort of, talk to the residents about what was happening. A lot of the time it was just handing out a mask, but other times it was trying to understand things like 'There's a person upstairs that doesn't want to come down. She's elderly and she doesn't speak the language. Can we have a nursing team go up to her? We are worried about her health'. So it was just creating those connections with the community that were really missing."*

Over time, the model evolved into a more integrated way of working that brought together clinical, community engagement and social support teams. This shift reflected a recognition that effective responses rely as much on relationships and understanding of place as on technical expertise. Several new programs also evolved from *HRAR*, strengthening local partnerships and community capacity to prepare for future challenges (see Figure 3).

The experience transformed how cohealth designs and delivers services. The organisation now places greater emphasis on local leadership, collaboration, and adaptable service design - principles that not only strengthen responses to public health emergencies but also support long-term community wellbeing in the face of other shocks and stressors.

Figure 3: Programs that have evolved from HRAR model



## Lessons

- **Deep local relationships enable rapid and culturally safe public health responses**  
cohealth's longstanding presence in public housing estates allowed fast mobilisation and high engagement where trust in government was low.
- **Bicultural and lived-experience roles fundamentally shift outcomes**  
The Health Concierge model demonstrated that peer-based, in-language engagement can remove major access barriers and build lasting community capacity.
- **Integrating clinical, engagement and social support functions strengthens response quality**  
Moving beyond siloed health delivery allowed cohealth to address intertwined health, social and practical needs.
- **Short-term funding undermines continuity**  
Once crisis-specific programs ended, gaps re-emerged, illustrating the need for stable preparedness funding.
- **Cross-sector partnerships improve coordination**  
Strong working relationships with councils, housing managers and state agencies supported smoother access, communication and resourcing pathways.

### Learn more about this case study

- 'High-risk accommodation from COVID-19' (Article)  
<https://www.cohealth.org.au/news/high-risk-accommodation-covid/>
- 'Taking the heat out of energy bills for people in public housing' (Article)  
<https://www.cohealth.org.au/news/taking-the-heat-out-of-energy-bills-for-people-in-public-housing/>
- 'Evaluating a peer-to-peer health education program in Australian public housing communities during the COVID-19 pandemic' (Article)  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12913-024-10627-7>
- 'Paving the way forward initiative' (Webpage)  
<https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/paving-way-forward-initiative>



Source: Wyndham City Council

## CASE STUDY 2

# Resilient Wyndham: A local government approach to developing long-term community resilience

 SOCIAL CAPITAL

 HUMAN CAPITAL

 CULTURAL CAPITAL

 BUILT CAPITAL

 FINANCIAL CAPITAL

Wyndham City is one of Victoria's largest and fastest-growing municipalities located in Melbourne's outer west. Home to a diverse and predominantly migrant population, the city experiences a unique set of social and environmental challenges, including rapid urban growth and vulnerability to changing climate, extreme weather events and their cascading impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the communities and the local economy. In response, Wyndham City Council led a highly adaptive and community-centred approach that evolved from internal risk management into a comprehensive strategy for supporting vulnerable communities with a focus on building long-term resilience. Wyndham City Council's experience demonstrated how local government can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between state-led health response and on-the-ground realities, building a foundation for community resilience with a long-lasting impact that extends far beyond the immediate crisis.

During the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wyndham City recorded some of Victoria's highest infection rates. The area's distinctive social and economic profile, including intergenerational households, limited public transport, and a high proportion of casual and essential workers without access to paid leave, intensified local transmission and created complex social, economic and health challenges. Initial state-led response mechanisms struggled to meet local needs, particularly for Wyndham City's culturally and linguistically diverse communities, resulting in delays in provision of essential support to the vulnerable residents.

Recognising these gaps, Wyndham City Council's Incident Management Team (IMT), initially formed for internal incident management and coordination, led a broader community response. Enabled by delegated authority from council's leadership, the IMT worked in partnership with the local community and community and health organisations to provide culturally responsive support to communities in Wyndham city. This included the bicultural workers and *CALD Communities Outreach Program*, which engaged local leaders to advocate with, and on behalf of their communities, and develop communication plans tailored to their needs.

This approach significantly improved reporting, testing, and vaccination rates, while strengthening trust and connection between the council and communities. This enabled Wyndham City Council to move from a reactive approach to a proactive model that prioritised local knowledge, flexibility, and collaboration.

Partnerships and cross-sector collaboration were critical to this response. When a community survey revealed that residents placed greater trust in their local general practitioners than in government-led response, the council established a working group that brought together general practitioners, local healthcare clinics, and council staff. Council facilities were offered as vaccination sites and outreach was embedded in trusted local networks. This collaboration allowed vaccination services to be delivered in accessible locations and supported culturally safe communication with communities.

Beyond the immediate public health response, the council undertook extensive community engagement to maintain and strengthen trust, connection and wellbeing during periods of lockdown and restrictions. In-language videos, educational sessions with community and faith leaders, and targeted outreach at mosques and local community hubs helped address

misinformation and encouraged uptake of testing and vaccinations. Council staff coordinated food deliveries and wellbeing checks for isolated households and businesses. Economic resilience was supported through the *WynLocal* program, which helped more than 280 local businesses diversify and build digital capacity.<sup>15</sup>

The *Resilient Wyndham 2021-2025*, a framework focused on strengthening Wyndham city's resilience and ability to better prepare for future shocks and stressors, was developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on learnings from the council's response. Grounded in the understanding that resilience extends beyond emergency response, the strategy integrated social, environmental, and economic dimensions of wellbeing. It emphasises local leadership, social connection, and inclusive decision-making as key enablers in strengthening community resilience to climate change, disasters and extreme weather. A key focus of the strategy and council's ongoing resilience work is building social cohesion to strengthen community resilience, for example through initiatives like the *Tool Library*, which not only shares practical tools, but also connects isolated residents into supportive networks, supporting them to prepare for future shocks and stressors.

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15 Grigsby 2020

## Lessons

- **Local government can bridge system gaps during crises**  
Wyndham City Council's Incident Management Team demonstrated how councils can adapt internal structures to meet rapidly evolving community needs.
- **Culturally tailored communication improves uptake and trust**  
Co-designing messages with bicultural leaders and community groups significantly improved community engagement during COVID-19.
- **Organisational learning drives long-term change**  
COVID-19 insights directly shaped Wyndham City Council's *Resilient Wyndham* framework, embedding preparedness and social cohesion as strategic priorities.
- **Mobilising diverse staff skills strengthens multi-layered response**  
Wyndham City Council's ability to draw on internal expertise (e.g., infectious disease knowledge) supported rapid adaptation beyond traditional council functions.
- **Equity must be built into local government preparedness planning**  
Targeted engagement with communities facing structural disadvantage was critical to ensuring equitable access to information, support and services.

### Learn more about this case study

- 'Resilient Wyndham 2021-2025 ' (Strategy)  
<https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/resilientwyndham>
- 'The virus does discriminate: blue-collar Wyndham was Australia's coronavirus hotspot' (Article)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/dec/30/the-virus-does-discriminate-blue-collar-wyndham-was-australias-coronavirus-hotspot>



Source: GenWest

### CASE STUDY 3

## Embedding climate resilience in women's health: GenWest's path to gender-responsive and intersectional climate resilience

 SOCIAL CAPITAL

 HUMAN CAPITAL

 CULTURAL CAPITAL

 POLITICAL CAPITAL

GenWest is a community organisation working towards gender equity in Melbourne's west, and supports women who are disproportionately impacted by climate change, emergency, and disasters in urban settings. Informed by a climate justice framework, the organisation focuses on understanding and responding to the gendered implications of climate change, extreme weather, and public health emergencies. This priority reflects the organisation's commitment to addressing the specific vulnerabilities experienced by migrant and refugee women, while embedding climate resilience into its broader health promotion and gender equity work. This case study showcases how community organisations can effectively build and integrate climate and disaster resilience into their core work in ways that equitably strengthen community health and wellbeing.

GenWest's pathway into the climate resilience space emerged from its long-standing work in women's health, safety, and prevention of gender-based violence. With the inclusion of the "women in a changing society" as a priority area for women's health services by the Victorian Government, GenWest shifted its focus to explore how climate change and disasters were reshaping women's lives and deepening social inequities. In 2025, this focus became more explicit as "women in a changing society: climate change, emergency, and disaster situations", establishing a clearer organisational commitment to climate resilience and gender equity.

GenWest's Multilingual Health Education (MHE) team was first established during the COVID-19 pandemic to support migrant and refugee women through a peer-to-peer health education model. This model later became central to GenWest's *Flood Recovery Program* in Maribyrnong. GenWest did not have a formal climate resilience portfolio when they started working with flood affected communities in Maribyrnong. However, the place-based engagement with communities in Maribyrnong provided critical insight into climate change and disasters' impact on exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and resulting increase in violence against women. It was observed

that many residents, particularly those from migrant backgrounds, were unaware of flood risks, underinsured, and disconnected from support networks. Language and cultural barriers compounded these vulnerabilities, leaving communities vulnerable to both disasters and related social harms, such as family violence. This highlighted how gender, language, and culture intersect with structural inequities to shape who is most exposed to harm in disasters.

These insights emphasised the need for a coordinated, gender-responsive approach to climate resilience within GenWest's health promotion work. With the appointment of an externally funded role focussed on climate resilience, GenWest began formalising its climate resilience approach. This included strengthening partnerships across the community and emergency management sectors, embedding climate resilience across its prevention work, and developing targeted community education programs.

A key lesson from the Maribyrnong floods was that community resilience is strongest when meaningful connections exist before a crisis occurs. Drawing on this, GenWest expanded its climate resilience work into Wyndham City and the City of Melton, shifting from reactive crisis support to proactive preparedness. This program focuses on financial resilience and insurance literacy, social cohesion and community connection, and community leadership through local leadership

and advisory groups. Community advisory groups, comprising local leaders and community members, are embedded in program design and delivery, with members remunerated for their time and expertise. They provide a mechanism for feedback, knowledge exchange, and co-design, allowing programs to be responsive, culturally safe, and contextually relevant.

GenWest's efforts to support local climate resilience effectively demonstrates how a state-funded women's health service can apply gender equity lens to strengthen community preparedness to climate change, disasters and emergencies. By centring migrant and refugee women in decision making, whose needs and voices are often excluded in emergency planning and management, GenWest is helping build more equitable, connected, and resilient communities in the face of increasing climate-related events and disasters. GenWest's approach is distinguished by its systematic use of gender equity and intersectionality across all climate resilience activities, ensuring that the voices of women experiencing marginalisation are centred in program design and advocacy. The work is grounded in an understanding that climate change and disasters exacerbate existing inequities, particularly gender-based violence, and therefore ensures that prevention strategies are embedded in climate resilience efforts.

*“We are working with the migrant communities in Wyndham and Melton at this stage to increase their preparedness. We’re looking at financial preparedness, talking about insurance and what that looks like. We’re talking about having an emergency plan and thinking about, ‘Hey, what risk am I in? Do I live in a flood zone? Do I live in a bushfire zone or a grass fire zone? What actually are my local risks? I don’t know, maybe look it up. If there was an event, how would we find out?’”*

## Lessons

- **Climate resilience must account for gendered and intersectional harm**  
GenWest's work highlighted how disasters exacerbate risks such as family violence, economic insecurity and service exclusion for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- **Peer-led, multicultural engagement strengthens preparedness**  
The Multilingual Health Education model proved effective in both crisis and preparedness contexts, particularly for culturally diverse women.
- **Lived-experience leadership improves cultural safety and relevance**  
Bicultural workers shaped program design, communication and community mobilisation in ways that would not have been possible through traditional outreach.
- **Learning from recovery improves proactive planning**  
Insights from Maribyrnong floods informed the move into financial preparedness, insurance literacy and risk awareness in Wyndham and Melton.
- **Partnerships expand influence and impact**  
Collaboration across emergency management, councils and community groups positioned GenWest to integrate gender equity into broader climate resilience work.

### Learn more about this case study

- 'Our Community, Our Voice' (Report)  
<https://genwest.org.au/news-and-events/ourcommunity-ourvoice/>
- 'Flood Insurance Guide: A Maribyrnong Community Initiative' (Resource)  
<https://genwest.org.au/resources/flood-insurance-guide/>
- 'Our Community, Our Voice: Wyndham and Melton' (Webpage)  
<https://genwest.org.au/what-we-do/health-wellbeing-programs/climate-resilience/our-community-our-voice/wyndham-melton/>
- 'GenWest's Climate Resilience and Multilingual Health Education teams win the Victorian Resilience Award' (Article)  
<https://genwest.org.au/news-and-events/victorian-resilience-award-win/>



Source: Maribyrnong Catchment Resilience Association

## CASE STUDY 4

# The Maribyrnong Catchment Resilience Association's story: Building resilience from the ground up

- SOCIAL CAPITAL
- HUMAN CAPITAL
- BUILT CAPITAL
- POLITICAL CAPITAL

The Maribyrnong Catchment Resilience Association Inc (MCRA) was established in December 2023 as a community-led response to the Maribyrnong Floods of October 2022. MCRA has developed an approach grounded in lived experience, subject-matter expertise, local knowledge and strong community relationships. The initial focus on addressing the gaps in recovery response has evolved into a sustained, community-led approach that strengthens preparedness for future climate challenges.

The flood event revealed significant flaws in council-led disaster recovery response, particularly in the early days when impacted residents required coordinated, practical, and trauma-informed support. Formal recovery mechanisms, including the Community Recovery Committee (CRC), were limited in their engagement with the community and did not adequately identify or address the community's needs following the floods. Essential supports, including financial counselling and guidance on insurance processes, were largely unavailable in the immediate period following the floods, when they were most needed. These gaps highlighted the need for an independent and authentic community voice, serving as the catalyst for the establishment of MCRA.

Community members mobilised independently to provide support, sharing information, advocating for assistance, and identifying unmet needs. This informal collaboration later evolved into a formalised grassroots organisation, funded primarily through membership fees. Door knocking in flood affected areas and targeted social media communication played a central role in early engagement, resulting in more than 700 members, with a projected increase to over 1,000 once charitable status is achieved.

A core feature of MCRA's approach is its framing of resilience as a shared responsibility between communities and decision makers (including commercial entities and public sector interests).

*“The people with the least amount of power cannot be expected to affect the maximum amount of change. That is completely unreasonable. Whilst we have a responsibility to adapt, we can't do so without support; informed, authentic support.”*

MCRA emphasises that while communities have a role in preparing and adapting, they cannot be expected to build resilience without appropriate systemic support. This principle has shaped MCRA's engagement with government, community organisations, private interests and research partners, and has informed its strategic approach and 'projects-based' advocacy model. MCRA's membership includes not only community members with lived experience but also engages subject-matter experts in areas such as hydrology, engineering, resource economics, and emergency management, enabling the organisation to participate in technical discussions with a high degree of capability and evidence-based insights grounded in place.

MCRA's work is organised around three strategic pillars: mitigation, emergency management, and insurance reform. These areas reflect the immediate and long-term risks facing the communities and the need for coordinated and informed resilience responses. Three major projects have emerged from this work, each focused on strengthening partnerships and community capacity to prepare for future challenges (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: MCRA's current (as of January 2026) projects

### Melbourne Water's Mitigation Solution Study

- The study will investigate flood mitigation options to support a reduction in future flood risk, to prioritise the safety of communities in the Maribyrnong River catchment area.
- MCRA is a lead community partner in the study, bringing community perspectives and participating in decisions about how flood mitigation options are assessed and selected.
- MCRA is also conducting parallel analysis and assessments to validate different aspects of the study.

### Property Flood Risk Cards (PFRCs)

- MCRA advocated for the return of flood charts distributed to households in high risk areas up until the mid-2000's.
- Advocacy led to a pilot program; PFRCs were distributed to Maribyrnong River Township residents in August 2025.
- Supports community with preparedness, emergency planning and response.
- MCRA is exploring partnership opportunities and funding pathways to facilitate continuation of the program at state and national levels.

### BUILTResilient

- Aims to demonstrate best-practice urban flood resilience building design and influence insurance industry practices toward proactive risk-reduction investment.
- Working in partnership with the University of Melbourne, government and insurance sector stakeholders.
- Aims to deliver two resilience exemplars: a new build and a retrofit to showcase best-practice flood resilient design.

In addition to its project and advocacy activities, MCRA maintains a strong focus on community engagement through workshops, preparedness events, and community gatherings, that support social capital, shared learning and connection. These activities strengthen community resilience and provide accessible opportunities for residents to stay informed and involved. MCRA's advocacy also secured extended free membership at the Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre, through the *R2R – Recovery to Resilience* program, for flood-affected families. This demonstrated a strategic use of an existing community asset to meet a critical community need at minimal cost. When Council temporarily discontinued the program during the interim phase of MCRA's establishment, the organisation successfully advocated for its reinstatement and ongoing support. The program is

now transitioning to 50% membership after running for 3 years as the official recovery period concluded in December 2025. This initiative supports physical wellbeing, provides an accessible community space, and reduces financial pressure for households, particularly for families with children.

MCRA positions itself as one of the few organisations engaged in long-term, community-led resilience and climate change planning for the Maribyrnong Catchment. The organisation's integration of lived experience, local knowledge and strategic advocacy has shaped a model that is both place-based and systemically focused. MCRA's journey demonstrates the strength of community leadership and place-based approaches in fostering long-term resilience and preparedness for future disasters and climate change.

## Lessons

- **Community-led governance fills critical gaps in recovery and preparedness**  
MCRA emerged to address failures in early flood recovery and continues to provide a sustained, autonomous community voice.
- **Combining lived experience with technical expertise amplifies influence**  
MCRA's mix of residents, engineers, hydrologists and economists enabled participation in complex system-level discussions and mitigation planning.
- **Trauma-informed practice is essential for long-term community involvement**  
Supporting affected residents requires structures that prevent burnout and recognise ongoing distress.
- **Solutions-focused advocacy drives systemic change**  
Successful initiatives such as the reinstated Property Flood Risk Cards demonstrate how communities can shape policy and practice when resourced and respected.
- **Grassroots mobilisation strengthens preparedness**  
Events, workshops and accessible information builds cohesion and maintains engagement beyond the immediate crisis period.

### Learn more about this case study

- 'Maribyrnong River catchment flood mitigation study' (Webpage)  
<https://letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/maribyrnong-river-flood-model/flood-mitigation-study>
- 'Flood charts return in pilot program' (Article)  
<https://maribyrnonghobsonsbay.starweekly.com.au/news/flood-charts-return-in-pilot-program/>



Source: Wyndham Park Community Centre

## CASE STUDY 5

# Building resilient neighbourhoods: Wyndham Park Community Centre's integrated approach to climate resilience

 SOCIAL CAPITAL

 HUMAN CAPITAL

 FINANCIAL CAPITAL

Wyndham Park Community Centre (WPCC) is a neighbourhood house in Wyndham City whose journey into climate and community resilience has been shaped by the evolving needs of its community, social inequity and intensifying climate pressures. While the community might not directly attribute the challenges they face to climate events alone, the compounding impacts of heatwaves, storms, flooding and resulting disruptions exacerbate everyday pressures, particularly for those experiencing cost-of-living stress, housing insecurity, and limited access to essential services.

WPCC's focus on climate resilience did not result from a defined organisational shift; rather, it evolved organically through a combination of existing practices, sector partnerships, and opportunities that aligned with the neighbourhood house's values. WPCC's involvement with Network West and *A Local Approach to Climate Resilience (ALACR)* project provided a pathway for the organisation to take on a more intentional role in this space. This led to the development of the *Resilience In-House* project, which engages neighbourhood and community houses in more formal climate and community resilience conversations, encouraging more systematic and deliberate thinking about resilience in everyday practice.

Alongside this strategic work, WPCC has continued to develop practical sustainability initiatives that have become central to its identity. The *Tool Library*, funded by Sustainability Victoria and local councils, encourages borrowing rather than buying, with most tools donated by community members. This reduces waste while also creating opportunities for social connection. The community garden, bike hub and biodigester further reflect WPCC's commitment to embedding sustainable and inclusive activities into daily practice. While these initiatives can be described through a resilience lens, staff emphasise that they were primarily designed to enhance the

experience of those who use the centre; resilience is a perspective applied to work already grounded in community need.

A defining feature of WPCC's approach is its commitment to integrated place-based practice. Rather than relying on isolated projects, the centre operates as an interconnected ecosystem of services, relationships, and shared values. Programs are deliberately linked so they reinforce each other, building resilience through relationships as much as through practical resources. For example, surplus food from food relief is used in community lunches, where volunteers learn skills for turning leftover food into shared meals. This interconnected model reflects a "permaculture-like" ecology where many small, mutually reinforcing components create a stable and resilient community ecosystem.

*"Every action that somebody does in this place is shaping some of what the place is."*

WPCC's climate resilience work is also informed by climate justice lens. Wyndham City is home to many recently arrived families, refugees, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people living in social housing. Staff and volunteers recognise that those already experiencing structural and

systemic disadvantage are more vulnerable to climate impacts. WPCC's role is therefore not only to provide immediate support but also to foster a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment where people can build confidence, connection, and long-term belonging.

This work is supported by a strong organisational culture driven by values rather than rigid strategic directives. Flexibility, both in practice and in adapting to changing funding landscapes, enables WPCC to respond effectively to shifting climate, social, and economic conditions. Much of the WPCC's innovation is driven by staff passion, volunteer commitment, and the lived experience of community members. With approximately

fifty volunteers supporting a small staff team, relationships and trust are fundamental to the organisation's resilience work. These relationships are often the reason people initially engage with the neighbourhood house and are central to sustaining long-term engagement.

WPCC's ongoing work demonstrates how neighbourhood houses can function as foundations for long-term, community-led resilience. By combining practical sustainability initiatives with strong social capital and a commitment to equity and justice, the neighbourhood house is developing a place-based model for adapting to climate change while strengthening the wellbeing and cohesion of Wyndham community.

## Lessons

- **Interconnected everyday activities create cumulative resilience**  
WPCC shows that food relief, community meals, tool sharing and gardens together form an ecosystem that supports adaptation and connection.
- **Social capital is the foundation of neighbourhood resilience**  
High volunteer engagement, trusted relationships and long-term community presence enable rapid response in times of need.
- **Values-driven flexibility enables responsive practice**  
WPCC's principles-led approach allows it to adapt quickly to emerging climate and social pressures without needing new, standalone programs.
- **Equity and inclusion underpin meaningful resilience-building**  
Climate justice framing ensures that activities intentionally support communities most exposed to climate and cost-of-living stress.
- **Diverse skills strengthen adaptability**  
A broad mix of volunteer and staff expertise increases the WPCC's capacity to respond to different shocks and stressors.

### Learn more about this case study

- 'Climate Resilience Workshop' (Webpage)  
<https://www.wyndhamparkcc.com.au/news/climate-resilience-workshop/>
- 'Wyndham Park Tool Library' (Webpage)  
<https://www.wyndhamparktoolibrary.com.au/>



Source: Network West

## CASE STUDY 6

# Network West: Coordinating climate action across a neighbourhood house network

### SOCIAL CAPITAL

Network West supports and advocates for 54 neighbourhood houses and community centres across Melbourne's western suburbs. Through the A Local Approach to Climate Resilience (ALACR) project, funded by the Greater Melbourne Foundation, Network West worked with neighbourhood houses to build practical skills, strengthen local connections, and support communities in preparing for and responding to climate change impacts.

ALACR, which ran over two years, focused on engaging neighbourhood houses and their communities in climate resilience conversations. The project highlighted the importance of adequate resources and trusted relationships, recognising that neighbourhood houses are often under-resourced, respond to a wide range of community needs, and operate in contexts where climate change can be a sensitive topic. To navigate these challenges, ALACR adopted flexible, community-centred approaches, using accessible, place-based language tailored to local contexts.

One initiative within ALACR, the *Flourish* project, brought together four neighbourhood houses/ community centres in Wyndham City to strengthen local connections and provide practical information on emergency preparedness and climate resilience.

*“Without that work done in the previous two years, without laying the foundations and the work, the Resilience In-House project wouldn't have happened.”*

Rebranding climate resilience workshops as 'Flourish' workshops, helped frame discussions around practical sustainability and community wellbeing rather than abstract or technical climate change terminology, making them more approachable and engaging. Similarly, as part of ALACR, one neighbourhood house integrated climate resilience concepts into its existing English classes. Rather than creating new standalone programs, this approach layered climate resilience into established learning spaces, building on trusted relationships and strengthening the

community's existing knowledge base. This approach enabled participants to engage meaningfully with resilience concepts without feeling intimidated or overwhelmed, fostering genuine grassroots participation.

A key learning from *ALACR* was that grassroots, participatory approaches are vital. By building on existing relationships and local knowledge, neighbourhood houses can reach communities often excluded from formal climate resilience work, including new immigrants, culturally and

linguistically diverse groups, and LGBTIQ+ communities. Neighbourhood houses already provide much of the foundational work necessary for climate resilience, including creating safe and welcoming spaces, fostering social connections, and building trusted networks within their communities. Integrating a climate resilience perspective into these existing activities enhances and strengthens their impact without replacing or disrupting the essential support structures they already provide.

## Lessons

- **Long-term relationship-building is essential for grassroots climate action**  
Houses are often overextended; sustained engagement requires trust, continuity and time.
- **Flexible funding enables real-world responsiveness**  
The *ALACR* project demonstrated that rigid funding models inhibit locally tailored, iterative practice.
- **Accessible language and framing improve participation**  
Shifting from “climate resilience” to practical wellbeing concepts (e.g., through the Flourish workshops) increased community engagement.
- **Embedding resilience into existing programs rather than creating new programs**  
Integrating resilience concepts into English classes and other established activities allowed for deeper, more inclusive participation, and effective use of resourcing.
- **Neighbourhood houses act as de facto resilience infrastructure**  
They already provide the trusted spaces, relationships and supports that make climate adaptation possible at the community level.

### Learn more about this case study

- ‘A Local Approach to Climate Resilience’ (Webpage)  
<https://networkwest.net/projects/>

## Cross-case lessons summary: Patterns in enabling conditions

The lessons from the case studies demonstrate some recurring patterns that underpin effective organisational and community resilience across diverse contexts. The table below provides a consolidated view of how these conditions were expressed within each case, highlighting both commonalities and areas of differentiation.

Table 1: Enabling conditions observed across case studies

Enabling Condition	cohealth	Wyndham City Council	GenWest	Maribyrnong Catchment Resilience Association	Wyndham Park Community Centre	Network West
<b>Community-led and place-based approaches</b>	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate
<b>Justice, equity and inclusion</b>	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
<b>Trusted relationships and cross-sector partnerships</b>	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Strong
<b>Organisational learning and adaptability</b>	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Strong
<b>Flexible funding and enabling governance systems</b>	Limited	Moderate	Moderate	Limited	Moderate	Limited
<b>Evidence-informed action</b>	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Moderate

Table 1 highlights the distinct yet overlapping ways in which each case study expressed the core conditions for resilience. While all organisations demonstrated strengths in several areas, differences in context, funding, community relationships, and organisational maturity shaped how these conditions were enacted. The following section synthesises these insights to identify the shared themes that underpin effective climate and community resilience across the region.



## Findings

Across the six case studies, several interrelated lessons and themes emerged that illustrate how CSHOs strengthen climate and community resilience. These findings reveal highlight shared enablers, structural barriers, and strategies that support long-term adaptive capacity. The section synthesises dominant themes from practice, highlighting both what is working and what

requires strengthening, and identifies the forms of capital that communities and organisations draw on to shape their capacity to respond to climate change and related shocks and stressors. Table 2 summarises the key themes, enablers, and challenges that emerged across the case studies. The sections that follow explore each theme in-depth.

*Table 2: Key themes, enablers and challenges in resilience practice*

Theme	Key enablers	Barriers and challenges
<b>Community-led, place-based approaches</b>	Local knowledge; grassroots engagement; funding models that support place-based work	Rigid funding structures; top-down program design
<b>Justice, equity and inclusion</b>	Intersectional lens; lived experience; community leadership	Systemic inequalities; marginalisation of women, migrants, refugees, CALD communities and First Nations peoples
<b>Trusted relationships, collaboration and strong cross-sectoral partnerships</b>	Strong social capital; networks; relationships with communities and across organisations; funding	Lack of coordination; siloed efforts; significant time and resourcing required to build and maintain relationships
<b>Organisational learning and adaptability</b>	Reflection, debriefing, knowledge retention; flexible and enabling processes and adaptable organisational culture; leadership that is willing to take lessons on board	Knowledge loss from staff turnover; rigid organisational processes; limited funding
<b>Innovative approaches</b>	Applying climate justice and equity lens; evidence-informed advocacy; adaptive frameworks; tailored approaches to local context	Lack of existing practice models; complex emerging challenges

# 1. Community-led and place-based approaches to resilience

## Key insights:

- *Effective climate adaptation and disaster response rely on community-led, place-based approaches grounded in local context.*
- *Community-led and place-based approaches draw on and strengthen human and cultural capital, including local knowledge, skills, cultural practices, and lived experience.*
- *Community-led program design and delivery build trust, relevance, and equitable access to services.*
- *Embedding resilience within existing systems and practice generates cumulative, long-term impact.*

Across the case studies, organisations demonstrated a clear understanding that climate-related shocks and stressors are experienced differently across places and communities. As a result, standardised or top-down service models were seen as insufficient for addressing the complexity of local needs. Instead, organisations emphasised the importance of responses shaped by community priorities, cultural knowledge, and the lived experience of residents.

Community-led, place-based approaches enabled organisations to remain flexible and responsive as conditions and needs changed. Engaging community members directly in program design and delivery, often through bicultural workers, and people with lived experience, ensured responses were culturally relevant and grounded in local experience. This strengthened trust and supported engagement and supported more sustainable outcomes, particularly in communities facing structural barriers to accessing services.

cohealth's *HRAR* program illustrates the effectiveness of this approach. By delivering services directly within public housing estates and employing trusted community members, *HRAR* reduced significant access barriers for residents experiencing high levels of disadvantage. Tailored, locally informed service delivery resulted in strong engagement and more equitable access to health services, with benefits extending beyond the immediate health crisis.

Grassroots initiatives further demonstrate the value of community-led approaches. The Maribyrnong Catchment Resilience Association, formed in

response to gaps in flood recovery, evolved into a sustained model of community-driven preparedness and advocacy. Grounded in the experiences of people directly affected by flooding, the approach supported both immediate recovery and longer-term resilience through advocacy, including initiatives such as *BULTResilient*.

Similarly, Wyndham Park Community Centre's case study highlighted how embedding a climate resilience lens within existing community activities can amplify impact without disrupting core support functions. Operating as an interconnected ecosystem of services, relationships, and shared practices, rather than discrete or standalone projects, enabled WPCC to strengthen compounding benefits over time. Coordinating food relief, community meals and local support within a broader resilience approach increased the community's capacity to respond to future shocks.

Across the case studies, enabling conditions included supportive leadership, flexible governance, and funding models that supported adaptation. Conversely, rigid funding structures and prescriptive program designs limited responsiveness and limited the effectiveness of place-based work.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that community-led, place-based approaches are anchored in human and cultural capital. Local knowledge, skills, lived experience, and cultural understanding inform program design and engagement strategies, while trust and connection reinforce these capitals over time - supporting both immediate response and longer-term resilience.

## 2. Justice, equity and inclusion

### Key insights:

- *Justice, equity and inclusion are central to building community and organisational resilience.*
- *Applying an intersectional lens helps organisations centre communities disproportionately affected by climate impacts.*
- *Bicultural and lived experience worker models strengthen cultural safety, inclusion, trust and responsiveness.*
- *Investing in cultural capital enhances equitable access, and collective adaptive capacity.*

Case studies consistently demonstrated that resilience cannot be achieved without a deliberate focus on justice, equity and inclusion. Organisations recognised that climate impacts intersect with existing social, economic and health inequities, disproportionately affecting communities already facing structural and systemic disadvantage. Applying an intersectional lens enabled organisations to centre and design responses that were culturally informed and accessible.

Making climate and resilience work meaningful and relevant emerged as a critical practice. In communities experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage, programs like ALACR framed climate change in practical, everyday terms, supporting engagement and reducing feelings of overwhelm or disengagement. As one case study participant explained:

*“It feels like it’s the forbidden word. So don’t talk about climate change, but talk about something practical. It’s something that people can actually do and feel like they can control and do something about.”*

Embedding lived experience within organisations further strengthened resilience. Bicultural and lived experience workers play a critical role in shaping culturally safe services, fostering strong connections with communities, and enabling organisations to respond effectively to emerging needs. Their insights informed program design, communication strategies and service delivery, ensuring responses remained relevant and responsive to community needs.

GenWest and cohealth’s intersectional approaches, which centred the voices of women, migrants, refugees, First Nations peoples, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, supported equitable access and strengthened organisational capacity to design inclusive programs. These practices also contributed to community cohesion and collective adaptive capacity – key components of long-term resilience.

Across these case studies, inclusive communication, culturally safe engagement, and trust-building were consistently highlighted as essential for resilience practice. These findings demonstrate that investment in cultural capital reinforces human and social capitals: local knowledge and skills shape trusted programs, while strengthened relationships and participation enhance community-level resilience.

### 3. Trusted relationships, collaboration, and strong cross-sectoral partnerships

#### Key insights:

- *Trusted relationships with communities and across organisations are essential for effective climate and disaster response and for building long-term resilience.*
- *Participation in networks, working groups, and cross-sector partnerships strengthens coordination, engagement, knowledge-sharing, and access to resourcing.*
- *Sustained investment in relationships builds social, political, and financial capital, enabling adaptive, coordinated, and culturally informed responses.*

Across the case studies, trusted relationships emerged as one of the strongest enablers of effective climate and disaster response. Organisations consistently emphasised that long-standing, trust-based relationships, both within communities and across the broader service system, enabled coordinated action during crises and supported more equitable, culturally informed, and adaptive responses.

Collaboration across sectors, including local government, health services, community organisations and state government departments strengthened collective impact by enabling coordinated service delivery, shared learning, and strategic advocacy. These partnerships also created opportunities to exchange knowledge, adapt service models, and influence systems-level change over time.

Strong collaborative relationships allowed organisations to share and replicate effective approaches. For example, the peer-to-peer health education and support model adopted by Wyndham City Council, GenWest, and cohealth across several programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Maribyrnong floods demonstrates how trusted partnerships can support the sharing and scaling of successful practice across contexts.

Participation in formal and informal networks, working groups, and steering committees further expanded organisations' access to resources and decision-making spaces. Initiatives such as the *A Local Approach to Climate Resilience* project

and *Resilience In-House* projects emerged directly from relationships established through earlier cross-sectoral collaborations. These networks enabled organisations to align priorities, combine expertise, and mobilise resources in response to emerging climate-related risks.

Cross-sector coordination was central to cohealth's COVID-19 response and the delivery of the *HRAR* program. Collaboration with local councils, community organisations, service providers, and state government departments enabled targeted outreach, rapid action through data sharing and streamlined communication, and demonstrated the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration in responding to public health emergencies and longer-term climate impacts.

Trusted relationships with communities were equally as critical. Building trust and strong relationships with communities can lead to effective and coordinated response during health emergencies and disasters and is a foundational element of community resilience. Bonding ties within communities and bridging ties between organisations and communities enabled high levels of engagement, even in challenging contexts. Neighbourhood houses, community-led organisations, and bicultural workers played a particularly important role in reaching communities during crisis, providing culturally safe communication, and supporting residents who were isolated or experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage.

Examples across the case studies illustrate how these relationships shaped effective response. cohealth's pre-existing relationships with public housing residents were central to the success of its COVID-19 response and the rapid rollout of the HRAR program. Similarly, GenWest's flood recovery work was strengthened by its established relationships with the Vietnamese community, developed through the employment of a bicultural worker who engaged residents in culturally safe and trusted ways.

Trusted local organisations played a particularly important role in effectively engaging communities during periods of crisis. Neighbourhood houses were frequently identified as highly responsive and trusted local hubs, enabling organisations to reach isolated residents and deliver timely, culturally appropriate information.

However, organisations also identified the significant time and resources required to build and maintain these relationships. Without sustained funding for relationship-based work, continuity and trust become difficult to maintain, and long-term engagement, particularly in communities facing disadvantage. As one case study participant reflected:

*"This work takes time. If you're gonna [sic] work at the grassroots level, you have to be prepared for that amount of time to bring community and people."*

Consistent with the existing literature and findings of the evidence review, the case studies reinforce the central role of social capital in enabling effective responses and building resilience. Relationships with communities and across organisations supported engagement, coordination, and rapid response during crises. These relationships also often facilitated access to financial capital, as participation in networks opened pathways to funding for new and existing initiatives.

Overall, these findings demonstrate the central role of social capital in enabling effective climate and disaster response. Strong relationships also enhanced political capital by increasing organisations' ability to influence decision-making and advocate for community needs, and they often facilitated access to financial capital through collaborative funding and resourcing opportunities. Together, these dynamics illustrate how sustained investment in relationships and cross-sectoral collaboration strengthens coordinated governance, improved resource access, and supports more resilient responses to complex climate and health challenges.



## 4. Organisational learning and adaptability

### Key insights:

- *Learning from past disaster response through reflection, debriefing, and documentation strengthens organisational resilience and forward-looking strategies.*
- *Organisational learning translates into community preparedness, addressing vulnerabilities before future disasters.*
- *Leadership support, flexible funding, and program adaptability are critical enablers, while high staff turnover and rigid structures limit learning.*
- *Investing in cultural and human capital through knowledge retention, lived experience, and reflective practice strengthens both organisational and community resilience.*

The case studies highlighted the importance of learning from disaster response work as a key enabler of organisational resilience. Reflection, structured debriefing, and documentation of lessons learned support continuity, knowledge retention, and proactive preparedness. By capturing insights from past disaster response work, organisations are able to move from reactive responses toward forward-looking strategies that anticipate and address emerging challenges. Wyndham City Council's *Resilient Wyndham* strategy is a strong example of organisational learning in practice, embedding lessons from COVID-19 response to strengthen resilience across Wyndham to better address acute shocks and ongoing stresses.

Importantly, organisational learning also contributes to community resilience. Flexible, values-led approaches and adaptable organisational cultures enable organisations to respond rapidly while remaining grounded in community needs. Ongoing reflection and knowledge-sharing help maintain organisational capacity through staff transitions and ensure that experience gained during previous responses informs future planning. Over time, this capacity to learn, adapt, and prepare strategically enhances both organisational effectiveness and community readiness for climate and health related events.

GenWest's climate resilience and disaster preparedness program in the City of Melton and Wyndham City illustrated how lessons from disaster recovery can be translated into community-focused preparedness initiatives. Insights gained from recovery work following flooding in Maribyrnong revealed that many community members were unaware of disaster risks, lacked preparedness, and experienced limited social connection. GenWest applied these learnings to shift from a reactive recovery model to a proactive preparedness approach, focusing on strengthening social connections, improving financial literacy, and building local capacity. This demonstrates how applying organisational learning not only improves internal capability but also directly enhances community resilience by addressing underlying vulnerabilities before future disasters occur. As one case study participant highlighted:

*"In Maribyrnong, it was in response; we've taken all the learnings from that and now we're doing preparedness, but the same model."*

Flexible funding and program design, combined with leadership that is willing to take lessons on board, were identified as critical enablers of organisational learning and adaptability. Several

participants emphasised the importance of leadership buy-in and the flexibility to adapt and pivot programs in response to emerging needs, enabling organisations to respond effectively to changing circumstances. Together, these factors allow organisations to embed lessons from past climate-related events and disasters, pivot approaches when needed, and maintain continuity in delivering culturally informed and responsive services.

Barriers to organisational learning include high staff turnover, which leads to loss of experience and institutional knowledge; limited funding to build on

previous programs; and insufficient government investment in approaches that have demonstrated effectiveness. As one case study participant noted:

*“When we walked into Maribyrnong, none of the lessons from COVID—something as simple as, ‘OK, this is the demographic of this community, let’s have a bicultural team member on the ground’—there was none.”*

These findings demonstrate that investing in cultural and human capital, through retaining knowledge, embedding lived experience, fostering reflective practices, and ensuring flexible funding and responsive leadership, strengthens organisational resilience. Organisations that can learn, adapt, and build on prior experience are better equipped to deliver responsive, culturally informed programs and to anticipate and address future shocks and stressors in their communities.



## 5. Innovative approaches

### Key insights:

- *By reflecting on practice, adapting to emerging challenges, and developing innovative solutions, organisations were able to respond effectively to complex, rapidly evolving situations.*
- *Applying a climate justice and equity lens encouraged the adaptation of existing frameworks to meet diverse community needs, ensuring responses were both relevant and inclusive.*
- *Evidence-informed advocacy and solutions-focused initiatives also enabled organisations to influence decision-making and drive meaningful change.*
- *Innovative approaches are underpinned by human and cultural capital. Local knowledge, lived experience, and professional expertise enable organisations to adapt and respond effectively, while evidence-informed and flexible practices strengthen their capacity to navigate complex challenges.*

The case studies highlight that innovation and solutions-focused approaches are central to both community and organisational resilience. By reflecting on practice, adapting to emerging challenges, and developing innovative solutions, organisations were able to respond effectively to complex, rapidly evolving situations. Applying a climate justice and equity lens encouraged the adaptation of existing frameworks to meet diverse community needs, ensuring responses were both relevant and inclusive. Evidence-informed advocacy and solutions-focused initiatives also enabled organisations to influence decision-making and drive meaningful change.

During climate and health emergencies, organisations demonstrated the capacity to reorganise, innovate, and tailor approaches to local contexts. cohealth, for example, introduced a locally recruited workforce with strong connections across different age groups, fostering trust and enabling more effective engagement. Innovation also involved critically reframing assumptions about service delivery:

*“It’s not the communities that are hard to reach, it’s your services... so we flipped it... and saw a real shift.”*

These examples illustrate adaptability, innovation, and problem-solving, which are essential components of organisational and community resilience.

Solutions-focused innovation was also evident through strategic partnerships and targeted advocacy. MCRA’s evidence-based advocacy for the reinstatement of *Property Flood Risk Cards (PFRCs)*, together with the *BUILTResilient* project’s focus on demonstrating best-practice flood-resilient design, highlights how evidence-informed solutions can strengthen both organisational and community resilience by influencing policy, guiding practice, and mitigating future risk.

Resilience-building efforts also required navigating intersecting challenges, including trauma, mistrust, structural inequities, and underfunding. As one case study participant noted:

*“The lockdown created a lot of distrust... anything coming in after had to overcome that.”*

Funding insecurity further compounded these challenges:

*“Funding ended the moment COVID ended... you can’t plan without knowing your future, but the stresses aren’t going anywhere.”*

These insights highlight that innovation is not only about new ideas or programs but also about addressing systemic barriers and cumulative harm, ensuring that responses are sustainable and equitable.

Organisations also relied on evidence to inform program design, service delivery, and funding advocacy. For instance, cohealth’s survey of more than 2,500 public housing residents identified dental care as a critical unmet need, leading to the

establishment of on-site outreach dental clinics and the development of wraparound services such as the *Community Connectors* program. Using data in this way reflects a strong culture of learning, accountability, and adaptive problem-solving.

These findings show that solutions-focused and innovative approaches are underpinned by human and cultural capital. Local knowledge, lived experience, and professional expertise enabled organisations to adapt and respond effectively, while use of evidence and flexible approaches reinforced organisational capacity to navigate complexity. Together, these strategies strengthen both organisational and community resilience, supporting the ability to adapt and respond to immediate and long-term climate and health challenges.





## Discussion

### Foundational conditions for climate resilience

This section outlines the core conditions that underpin climate resilience in Melbourne's west. Drawing on insights from case study interviews and the evidence review, these principles reflect the needs, challenges, and opportunities identified across the project. Together, they provide a practical foundation for strengthening responses to climate-related shocks while supporting sustained, long-term resilience.

#### Community-led and place-based practice

Resilience is strengthened when responses are grounded in local context, shaped by community knowledge, and responsive to the lived realities of people experiencing climate change and health impacts. Embedding lived experience, bicultural leadership, and local expertise in program design and delivery ensures relevance, trust, and sustained engagement.

This condition recognises that characteristics of place, including planning decisions, infrastructure, historical investment and social networks, shape both risk and resilience. Working within local contexts enables organisations to reduce structural barriers to access and build on existing social capital. Place-based practice also supports flexibility, allowing responses to evolve alongside changing needs rather than relying on standardised or top-down models.

### Justice-centred community engagement

Equity and inclusion must underpin all effective resilience-building efforts. Applying an intersectional and climate justice lens ensures that communities disproportionately affected by impacts of climate change are centred in decision-making.

Culturally informed practice, inclusive communication, and accessible service design were essential for building trust and supporting meaningful participation. Framing climate action in practical, everyday terms further supported engagement, particularly in communities facing structural and systemic disadvantage. By recognising cultural safety and lived experience as core forms of expertise, organisations strengthen both their own adaptability and the capacity that already exists within communities.

### Investment in social capital and cross-sectoral collaboration

Strong, trust-based relationships with communities and across sectors are foundational to effective response, recovery, and preparedness. Bonding ties within communities and bridging ties across organisations enable coordination, knowledge-sharing, and rapid mobilisation during and after crises.

Cross-sectoral partnerships and participation in formal and informal networks enhance collective impact by aligning priorities, sharing resources and supporting long-term resilience. These partnerships also create pathways for strategic advocacy and resource mobilisation. However, the findings also highlight that building and sustaining social capital requires time, continuity and long-term investment, underscoring the importance of funding models that recognise and support this foundational work.

## Embedding learning in practice

Organisational learning and adaptability are central to long-term resilience. Reflection, debriefing, and the systematic application of lessons learned support a shift from reactive responses to proactive, planned, and preventative approaches. When insights from disaster response are translated into ongoing initiatives, they strengthen organisational systems and community preparedness.

An organisational culture that supports adaptability, reinforced by leadership willing to act on learning, enables programs to pivot in response to emerging needs while maintaining continuity. Embedding learning institutionally is particularly important in contexts of staff turnover, short-term funding cycles and shifting policy environments.

## Systems that enable adaptive practice

Flexible funding and program design are essential for effective action in complex and rapidly changing contexts. The findings show that rigid funding structures limit responsiveness, while flexible models enable innovation, continuity, and locally tailored solutions.

Enabling systems allow organisations to adapt approaches without losing momentum, sustain trusted relationships, and embed learning into practice. Flexibility is therefore a core requirement for long-term resilience building.

## Using local and diverse evidence and knowledge to guide action

Resilience is strengthened when decisions draw on diverse forms of evidence, including data, evaluation, cultural insight, local knowledge, and lived experience. These forms of evidence are critical to informing effective program design, strengthen accountability, and support advocacy for system-level change. Evidence-informed approaches help organisations identify unmet needs, refine initiatives, and influence policy and funding priorities. Solutions-focused action also involves translating evidence into accessible and locally relevant initiatives, ensuring that learning leads to tangible, justice-aligned outcomes for communities.

Building climate resilience in Melbourne’s west requires more than program expansion. It requires shifts in power, funding, governance and accountability. The table below outlines the foundational conditions and the practical changes needed to operationalise them.

*Table 3: Summary of foundational conditions for climate resilience in Melbourne’s west*

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Required shift in practice</b>	<b>What this looks like in practice</b>	<b>Institutional implications</b>
<b>Community-led, place-based practice</b>	From consultation to shared decision-making	Communities co-design priorities, strategies and indicators. Lived experience is recognised and resourced as expertise. Programs are tailored to hyper-local climate risks and social conditions. Decision-making authority is devolved where possible.	Funding models allow locally defined solutions. Governance structures enable shared authority. Institutions shift from directing to enabling.
<b>Justice-centred community engagement</b>	From inclusion as participation to equity as structural principle	Those disproportionately affected by climate impacts are central to planning and governance. Engagement is culturally grounded, accessible, compensated and long-term. Power imbalances are acknowledged and addressed.	Equity is embedded in funding criteria, reporting and accountability frameworks. Decision-making processes prioritise those disproportionately impacted.
<b>Investment in social capital and cross-sectoral collaboration</b>	From isolated projects to coordinated ecosystem response	Dedicated resourcing for relationship-building across sectors. Clear coordination mechanisms and backbone functions. Informal community networks recognised as resilience infrastructure.	Multi-year funding supports collaboration infrastructure. Cross-sector governance mechanisms are formalised. Success is measured collectively rather than organisationally.
<b>Embedding learning in practice</b>	From static planning to adaptive systems	Regular reflection cycles following climate events. Data informs iterative redesign. Staff are supported to experiment and adapt. Learning is shared across networks.	Reporting frameworks value learning and adaptation. Policy settings allow flexibility. Risk tolerance increases to enable innovation.
<b>Systems that enable adaptive practice</b>	From rigid funding and compliance to enabling infrastructure	Flexible, multi-year funding. Streamlined reporting requirements. Procurement accessible to community organisations. Governance arrangements support shared accountability.	Institutions reduce administrative burden and align funding timelines with long-term resilience goals. Accountability shifts toward outcomes and equity impacts.
<b>Using local and diverse evidence to guide action</b>	From top-down data to co-produced knowledge systems	Quantitative risk data integrated with lived experience and cultural knowledge. Shared measurement frameworks developed collaboratively. Evidence translated into accessible formats.	Evaluation frameworks include community-defined indicators. Data governance supports transparency and equity monitoring. Evidence informs continuous improvement.

# Recommendations for a resilient Melbourne's west

Building climate and community resilience in Melbourne's west requires coordinated action across multiple levels of the system because the region's climate risks are shaped by structural conditions rather than individual or organisational shortcomings. Rapid population growth, infrastructure lag, entrenched socioeconomic inequities, and uneven exposure to heat, flooding and air quality hazards create a landscape where climate impacts are both intensified and unevenly distributed. These dynamics intersect with fragmented governance across local governments, state agencies and service systems, making alignment and coordination essential.

Within this context, each group addressed in the recommendations holds a distinct form of power and responsibility. *Government* sets the system conditions through policy, regulation and long-term planning, and therefore plays a critical role in aligning emergency management, public health and climate adaptation strategies. *Funders* shape the resourcing environment that determines whether community organisations can sustain the

relationship building, cultural safety work and cross sectoral collaboration that underpin resilience. *Organisational leaders and decision makers in CSHOs* translate these system conditions into internal structures, cultures and priorities that enable or constrain adaptive practice. *CSHO resilience practitioners*, in turn, enact resilience on the ground through community led, culturally grounded and evidence informed practice.

Resilience in Melbourne's west emerges not from isolated initiatives but from the interaction of these roles within a shared regional system. When government reforms create enabling policy settings, funders provide flexible and long-term investment, leaders embed resilience into organisational strategy, and employees centre community knowledge and lived experience, the region is better positioned to address the structural inequities that shape climate vulnerability. Integrating the recommendations across these levels ensures that resilience efforts are coordinated, justice aligned and grounded in the lived realities of communities across the west.

*Table 4. Overview of roles and responsibilities in building local climate and community resilience across systems and actors*

Actor	Role	Responsibility
Government	Sets the system conditions with responsibilities for structural change	Responsibility for structural change
Funders	Enable or constrain organisational capacity	Shaping the resourcing environment
Organisational leaders and decision makers in CSHOs	Translate system conditions into practice	Responsible for institutional alignment and internal powershifting
Resilience practitioners in CSHOs	Enact resilience on the ground	Supporting the frontline drivers of community centred, justice aligned practice

## Recommendations for resilience practitioners in community service and health organisations

### 1. Embed organisational learning as a core resilience capability

Create structured processes that capture and apply lessons from climate- and disaster-related work. Embedding this learning across teams strengthens adaptive capacity and ensures insights inform future preparedness and long-term resilience.

### 2. Use place-based evidence to align action and strengthen collective resilience

Draw on local data, community insight, and lived experience to shape service delivery and advocacy. Aligning this evidence with local government and health system priorities supports coordinated, preventative action and reduces duplication.

### 3. Integrate social and health determinants into climate and disaster resilience planning

Recognise climate change as a multiplier of existing social and health inequities and design programs that respond to these intersecting pressures. Integrating issues such as family violence, mental health distress and financial hardship into resilience planning supports long-term wellbeing, safety and social cohesion.

### 4. Strengthen community-led and culturally grounded resilience practice

Centre community voices, cultural knowledge and lived experience in program design and delivery. Resourcing bicultural and lived experience roles and embedding cultural safety across organisational practice ensures resilience approaches reflect local strengths and realities.

## Recommendations for organisational leaders and decision-makers in community service and health organisations

### 1. Embed climate and community resilience as a core organisational commitment

Integrate climate and community resilience into organisational strategy and frameworks, aligning this work with equity commitments, community leadership, and long-term sustainability planning.

### 2. Cultivate a learning oriented and adaptive organisational culture

Strengthen organisational practice by supporting reflection, innovation, and program flexibility. Ensure lessons from climate-related events and disaster responses are systematically reviewed, shared and embedded across the organisation.

### 3. Advocate for enabling systems that support timely and effective responses

Improve responsiveness before and during crises by advocating for flexible funding and adaptive reporting arrangements, and by streamlining internal decision-making and approval processes to reduce delays and administrative burden.

### 4. Invest in workforce capability and wellbeing

Recognise and value lived experience, cultural expertise, and long-term staff knowledge as essential organisational strengths. Prioritise workforce wellbeing and stability to sustain organisational capacity during periods of stress and heightened demand.

## Recommendations for funders

### 1. Provide flexible, long-term and justice-aligned funding

Resource CSHOs through multi-year, flexible funding that supports preparedness, planning and ongoing resilience-building – not only response and recovery. Long term investment enables organisations to address structural inequities and sustain community-led resilience work.

### 2. Fund collaboration and cross-sector engagement as core work

Recognise collaboration, cross-sector engagement, and participation in networks as essential components of local resilience. Provide dedicated funding and organisational support so staff can meaningfully participate, rather than relying on voluntary or unfunded contributions.

### 3. Resource relationship building and community engagement as critical infrastructure

Acknowledge that trust-building, community engagement and partnership development are foundational to resilience. Fund the time, staffing and coordination required to sustain these relationships.

### 4. Invest in culturally safe practice and lived experience leadership.

Resource culturally safe engagement, bicultural workforce models and lived experience leadership as essential components of equitable climate resilience. Prioritise funding that strengthens community embedded knowledge and leadership.

## Recommendations for government

### 1. Avoid rigid program models and enable local adaptation

Design programs and funding arrangements that allow flexibility to adapt activities in response to emerging community needs. Avoid rigid models that constrain local decision-making or reinforce inequities.

### 2. Align accountability with long-term resilience outcomes

Shift accountability frameworks away from short-term outputs toward long-term community-defined resilience outcomes. Ensure reporting requirements reflect the complexity and duration of resilience building work.

### 3. Strengthen alignment between emergency management, public health and climate adaptation

Improve coordination between emergency management, public health and climate adaptation strategies at municipal and state levels. Work in partnership with CSHOs to embed lessons from disaster responses and support integrated, community-centred planning and service delivery.



## Conclusion

Strengthening climate resilience in Melbourne's west requires understanding resilience not as a single program or intervention, but as a system shaped by place, equity, relationships, and learning. Findings from the case studies and evidence review show that the conditions enabling resilience are already present across communities and community-serving organisations - but they require sustained support, coordinated action and enabling system settings to flourish.

Resilience is strongest when it is community-led and place-based, grounded in lived experience and shaped by local knowledge. It depends on justice centred engagement that recognises how climate change intersects with existing social and health inequities and ensures those most affected have genuine influence over decisions. The work of building trust, nurturing relationships and collaborating across sectors is foundational to preparedness, response and long-term recovery. These efforts must be resourced as core infrastructure, not treated as discretionary or peripheral.

CSHOs also need the ability to learn, adapt and iterate. Embedding reflective practice and translating lessons into ongoing initiatives enables a shift from reactive responses to planned, preventative action. This requires flexible and enabling systems including funding, reporting and governance settings that allow organisations

to respond to emerging needs without losing continuity. Diverse forms of evidence, including community insight and lived experience, further strengthen the relevance and impact of local resilience work.

Ultimately, resilience in Melbourne's west emerges through the interaction of a combination of roles within a shared regional system. When communities, organisations, funders and governments work collectively, with equity, flexibility and learning at the centre, the region is better positioned to address the structural conditions that shape vulnerability to climate and disaster impacts. By acting on the enablers and conditions outlined in this report and embedding the recommendations across all levels of the system, Melbourne's west can strengthen its capacity not only to withstand climate related shocks, but to support long-term community wellbeing, inclusion and justice.

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