Summary brief 3:

Strategic planning and priorities in the west of Melbourne

Understanding existing strategic planning and priorities across the region can help improve co-ordination and integration of climate action planning to better align the roles and needs of CHCSOs.

This brief synthesises some of the key considerations for CHCSOs within existing strategic planning and priorities identified in the west of Melbourne. It identifies policy and objective alignment, opportunities for collaboration, and illustrate how needs and opportunities in relation to health and climate change are already being actioned.

This synthesis draws from a desktop review of 25 strategic plans and policies for organisations ranging from Australian and Victorian Government departments to government funded advisory groups, local government, not-for-profits, coalitions of organisations, health providers, sporting clubs,

community groups and tertiary education institutions.

Because this is based on publicly accessible information, this brief does not claim to capture the full breadth of activities being undertaken in the region, but gives an indication of the extent and direction of activity in Greater Melbourne's west.

The review first looked at plans with a state or regional lens to better understand coordination and collaboration requirements and possibilities, before turning to localised strategies, networks and programs. A selection of the plans reviewed is outlined in **Table 3.1**, with the full details in **Appendix 2**.

Table 3.1 Selection of plans included in the desktop review

Priority	Type of plans	Examples
1	Regional and state level strategic plans	• Western Metropolitan Partnership • West of Melbourne Economic Development Alliance • Greater Melbourne Regional Climate Change Adaptation Strategy • Victorian Health and Human Services Adaptation Action Plan
2	Local plans and strategies related to organisations, specific issues or with more detailed reporting	• Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans • Greening the West Strategy • Strategic plans for local community health organisations, such as GenWest, IPC Health, cohealth and Djerriwarrh Health Services • North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network
3	Related programs, networks, and work that contribute to strategic understandings	• Western Bulldogs Community Foundation's health-focused programs • Networks facilitated by each of the region's councils, such as the Brimbank Social Justice Coalition • Growing Brimbank

Health and climate

Partnerships or alliances lead the strategic plans and policies reviewed (48 percent). These feature diverse membership, including federal, state and local governments, academic institutions, and CHCSOs. Over half of the strategic plans reviewed have a primary focus on health and wellbeing, with other focus areas including climate and environment, community, economic development or other (homelessness, family violence, gender inequality).

Primary focus on health and wellbeing

Plans and policies with a primary focus on health and wellbeing generally also had a range of actions in other areas. Reflecting priorities under the state public health and wellbeing plan, for example, municipal public health and wellbeing planning had a similar number of initiatives focused on health and wellbeing (31 percent), climate and environment (29 percent) and community (27 percent). Aligned with findings from the Municipal Association of Victoria, most of these plans, however, do not approach the priority of climate change and its impact on health in the same way.[1] One LGA, for example, refers to increasing the number of participants in local conservation activities as addressing the intersection of climate change and health.

The plans and strategies from health providers focused more on improving the existing health system through better integration and coordination of existing services and facilities, and improving youth and mental health outcomes.

Primary focus on climate change or environment

Strategic plans with a primary climate or environment emphasis were much more narrowly focused, with only a handful of initiatives in other areas including transport and connectivity, skills training, health system capacity and access, mental health, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community programs.

Documents from partnerships and alliances were focused most on climate-related actions and strategies including more climate resilient services, housing and infrastructure, landscape greening/ heat island reduction and improving climate change education and awareness. Local government plans and strategies had a more diverse spread of actions and strategies, covering climate change (notably emissions reductions, energy efficiency and greening/heat island reduction), health and wellbeing (particularly mental health and family violence) and community (with a particular concentration on community engagement/inclusion and housing affordability).

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Recurring themes in climate and health planning

The climate and environment related initiatives assessed are wide ranging but have a strong emphasis on the built and natural environment. Landscape greening and reducing the urban heat island effect, along with improving the resilience of physical infrastructure to climate change are dominant actions for these strategies **(Table 3.2).** Strategies focused on health and wellbeing, emphasise mental health and increasing health system capacity and access are a key focus **(Table 3.3).** Highlights of a few key initiatives in the west are described in **Boxes 3.1 to 3.3** below.

Table 3.2 Climate and environment focus - initiatives by type

Type of Initiative	Number
Landscape greening/heat island reduction	11
Climate resilient housing and buildings	7
Climate adaptation	6
Emissions reduction/zero emissions	6
Energy efficiency	6
Climate impact on health	5
Waste management and recycling	5
Climate education/awareness/engagement	5
Climate resilient infrastructure (transport and utilities)	4
Air quality	4
Water conservation and quality	4
Climate resilient services	3
Renewable energy	3

Table 3.3 Health and wellbeing focus - initiatives by type

Type of Initiative	Number
Mental health	12
Health system capacity and access	11
Youth health	8
Family violence	7
Health system integration/coordination	5
Health workforce training	2

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Box 3.1 Greening the West: The power of collaboration

Greening the West was established as a partnership in 2013 to tackle the lack of quality open spaces and urban greenery in the west of Melbourne, and the impacts on community health and wellbeing. In 2020, the initiative released the **Greening The West Strategy (2020-25)** which sets out eight goals and targets to guide partners towards a collective vision of "sustainable, liveable, healthy communities through urban greening."[2]

Barriers to achieving this include the need to demonstrate return on investment, an absence of private open space, limited knowledge of appropriate vegetation for the diversity of environments in the west, and the siloing of different urban greening projects.

Led by a steering committee consisting of representatives from Local and State Government agencies, network committees, industry associations, and community groups, the strategy outlines four strategic directions to achieve these collective goals and overcome their challenges:

- Planning for community health and wellbeing benefits of public open space

- Advocating for policy and institutional change around long=term funding

- Communicating, connecting and educating around the value of urban greening

- Promoting collaboration and securing commitment across LGA borders and organisations.

Box 3.2 Growing Brimbank: A deeper understanding of place

Growing Brimbank is a long-term collaboration between Victoria University's Mitchell Institute and Brimbank City Council to examine place-based risks to health, wellbeing and education. The program has released a series of reports examining in-depth key social indicators for the City of Brimbank, with the aim of preventing and reducing chronic conditions that affect the health, wellbeing, and prosperity of Brimbank residents.[3]

Research carried out by the Growing Brimbank program has contributed to a deeper understanding of characteristics of the west of Melbourne that will be affected by climate

change and will contribute to the region's ability to adapt to it. This includes:

- Analysing **changes in health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people** from 2006-2016

- Evaluating the **outcomes of health and education programs and service delivery** at the system, local and individual levels

- Mapping the **distribution, availability and contribution of physical and social infrastructure** for health and education outcomes in the community.

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Box 3.3 cohealth: Tackling the causes of health inequities

cohealth explicitly recognises the impacts of climate change on health, and that the greatest impacts are felt by people already facing disadvantage. In its current strategic plan, cohealth emphasises the importance of identifying the key drivers of health inequity, and the need to advocate for reform based on the best available evidence, "including the lived experience of our communities."[4]

In May 2022, cohealth released a **Climate change and health position statement** with a commitment to reducing their organisational carbon footprint, building community capacity and resilience, educating staff and service delivery partners on the impacts to cohealth's clients and operations, and advocating to all levels of government on the need for policies and programs that equitable address climate change impacts and hazards.[5] Key asks of the Victorian Government include:

• Building the capacity of the health and community services sector through the Health and Human Services Adaptation Action Plan 2022-2026 to ensure service continuity, client and workforce safety, and continuity of care

• Providing financial investment and appropriate resourcing to groups experiencing disadvantage to ensure they remain healthy in a changing climate.

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Findings and emerging opportunities

From this rapid review, it is clear that there are a wide range of activities and planning being undertaken to directly or indirectly improve the region's ability to cope better with the diverse impacts of climate change. However, at a local level, there are few policies and plans explicitly focused on the impact of climate change on health services in the west, as well as the capacity and capabilities of this sector to support those most at risk.

Key findings and considerations:

- **Comprehensiveness of municipal public health and wellbeing planning –** Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans (MPHWPs) are the most comprehensive in tackling intersecting issues around climate change, health and wellbeing and community resilience. This reflects the need for councils to respond to the priorities of state public health and wellbeing planning regarding climate change and health.

- **Municipal focus on sustainability and mitigation –** Across the MPHWPs, key focus issues include the need to reduce emissions, increase landscape greening to reduce heat island effects and increase amenity, improve waste management and recycling, and achieve more climate resilient housing and buildings. The three plans that explicitly mentioned climate change adaptation did so in the context of noting a separate climate change emergency or adaptation plan.

- **Health priorities in municipal planning –** Other focus areas in municipal planning include the need to improve mental health, reduce family violence, increase community engagement and inclusion (particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse communities), and improve housing security.

- **Omission of climate change from health system strategies –** Health providers are focused on improving the existing health system through better integration and coordination of existing services and facilities, and improving youth and mental health.

- **Alignment between strategies –** Strategies and plans for the region have been developed by national, state, regional, and community organisations. Scale is therefore a critical consideration when thinking about the balance between addressing people's immediate health and wellbeing needs and tackling the roots of climate injustice.

Key opportunities:

- **Understand the direct and indirect impacts of climate change –** Increase awareness and explicit recognition of the indirect impacts of climate change, particularly the links between climate risks and physical and mental health, domestic and family violence, and disadvantaged communities. For example, the health implications of rising energy costs.

- **Build on existing networks and collaborations –** Apply a climate justice lens to build on existing cross-regional and cross-sectoral activities such as emissions reduction, urban development,

landscape greening, public transport, housing, disaster risk reduction, adaptation and resilience, and community engagement and inclusion to strengthen coordination and regional outcomes.

- **Prioritise mutually reinforcing goals –** Make explicit how priority objectives for health and wellbeing link with climate justice. For example, increasing the stock of affordable housing and buildings well adapted to climate change has the advantage of reducing emissions, improving health and wellbeing, and reducing energy costs.

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Notes

[1] MAV, *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans 2021–2025: Report* (Melbourne, 2022), 6.

[2] Greening the West Steering Committee, *A Regional Approach to Delivering Community Health and Wellbeing: Strategic Plan 2020-2025* (Melbourne, 2020), iv, https://greeningthewest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/GTW-StrategicPlan2020-2050-v23.pdf.

[3] "Growing Brimbank," Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, accessed 30 August 2022, https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/community-intiatives/growing-brimbank.

[4] Cohealth, *Strategic Plan 2019-2023* (Melbourne, 2019), 14, https://www.cohealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/cohealth-Strategic-Plan-2019-2023.pdf.

[5] Cohealth, *Position Statement: Climate Change and Health* (Melbourne, 2022), 6-7, https://www.cohealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/cohealth-climate-change-and-health-position-statement-May-2022.pdf.