

Summary brief 4:

Organisations, networks and collaborations at the intersection of health and climate justice

Understanding opportunities for collaborative action first requires identifying how community health and community service organisations (CHCSOs) and related organisations are already connected to one another.

This brief synthesises insights from consultation with organisations relevant to health equity and climate change adaptation, such as CHCSOs, local and state government departments, water authorities, philanthropic funders, and community centres. Through an online survey, interviews, and participation in the development of a social network analysis (SNA) map, existing relationships between organisations were explored, and challenges and barriers to collaboration identified. This consultation process revealed potential opportunities to: a) leverage existing collaborations and information flows to build more diverse networks; b) draw on specific expertise, and c) understand different ways in which the health and community services sector might collaborate for climate justice.

Insights from survey and interview responses

Twenty-eight interviews, including with 14 of the 24 survey respondents, provided insights into the nature of collaborative relationships and knowledge areas in the west. It should be noted that the survey and interview responses reflect only a selection of the networks and connections. From this analysis, three key themes around collaborative relationships on climate justice emerged: competing organisational priorities, an authorising environment for collaboration and capacity for climate justice.

Competing organisational priorities

Most CHCSOs are already familiar with working across intersecting issues and sectors, including issues exacerbated by the impacts of climate change such as housing stress, food security, and poverty. Yet for most, climate change impacts and climate justice are not seen as an organisational core focus. Where it was a focus area, the issues were often framed through an emergency management lens. For the limited few CHCSOs engaged in climate justice, action is largely driven by organisational or sector champions:

"...with all these collaborations, if it's not your core business, then it's about whether the individual has a particular interest in this or not, without a dedicated person focused on it."

Existing participation in multiple collaborative networks and partnerships limits the capacity of many CHCSOs for further collaborative work. The impact of COVID-19 also continues to draw attention and momentum further away from issues of climate justice. For the majority, however, the actions and responses enabled through COVID-19 were key to thinking about climate justice:

"How do we make climate change and the impacts of climate change that are coming a priority? When we've got other priorities, like people homeless and mental health and health and alcohol and drugs. That's the challenge for us."

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An authorising environment for collaboration

CHCSOs and aligned organisations have diverse strengths that can be utilised for collaboration. Community organisations have grass roots connections and knowledge, while local councils and other larger organisations have the ability and capacity to convene diverse stakeholders and partners. Without an 'authorising environment', however, collaborative work is often stalled:

"[T]he governance arrangements need to be bedded down. Who's paying for what needs to be bedded down. Who's managing what? So we can know what we're all doing... there could be a lot of efficiency gains by clarifying those different collaborative arrangements."

Factors identified as supporting collaboration included clear collaborative priorities, a shared vision and goals, and relevant terms of reference. Having a shared vision, such as energy efficient housing or heat health, allows for a diversity of contributions while enabling joint action and asks **(see Box 4.1)**:

"...I think having that shared goal has made it a lot easier. Housing is sort of the bread and butter of a lot of social welfare organisations. And environmental organisations see housing as a great potential for reducing emissions and helping the environment."

Creating an authorising environment for collaborative decision-making requires diverse perspectives and processes to ensure underrepresented voices are included in decision-making. This includes equal partnership with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations:

"in any relationship, we need to ensure that all groups are there; all groups are represented... diversity is what I'd be looking for, when I set up a relationship or whether I'm part of one. [It's] not just what it's about, but actually who's at the table."

Lack of dedicated resourcing for action on climate justice

Capacity to take part in collaborative work depends on adequate resourcing (staff time and funding). Organisations often overlap in their focus, the locations in which they work, and the cohorts they engage. Services and approaches should be complementary and not duplicate existing work. For many, this suggests the need for a dedicated facilitator or convenor to translate sector interest into action:

"...capacity is a key challenge. [Collaboration] takes time and effort. And it takes resources to manage...there is a great deal of goodwill amongst [participating organisations] to collaborate. But everybody's busy. Everyone has a full board of work."

While climate change and issues of climate justice may be recognised in some organisational functions (i.e. strategic plans), there are gaps between this recognition and resourced programs. A reliance on project-based funding means that many CHCSOs are already limited in the ability to secure adequate and ongoing resourcing for their core objectives. The need for dedicated resources for climate related work was suggested, rather than adding onto already stretched workloads and budgets. This resourcing need could be supported through the inclusion of climate justice considerations and planning in organisational strategy and guiding documents, as well as budget and funding bids.

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Box 4.1 The Hot Spots Initiative: Place-based collaboration on heat and health

Through their **Hot Spots Initiative**, the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation supports CHCSOs, local government and emergency services to raise awareness around the health impacts of heatwaves. Since 2018, the initiative has enabled cross-sectoral collaboration in areas of Melbourne with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and higher temperatures during heatwaves.

Through Hot Spots Brimbank, IPC Health, along with partners such as Brimbank City Council, have worked to:

- Increase community awareness around the health impacts of extreme heat
- Co-design **relevant and culturally appropriate information materials and resources** specific to the needs of the Brimbank community
- Strengthen **cross-sectoral collaboration, knowledge sharing, and community resilience** around the effects of extreme heat.

Outcomes of this work have not only informed the place-based model used through this Collaborative Action Plan but the funding of new projects to increase sector capacity and the climate resilience of residents most at-risk. This includes:

- Leveraging the relationships, responsiveness, and expertise of neighbourhood houses to building climate resilience (Project lead: Network West)
- Providing residents in an urban 'hotspot' with opportunities to participate in residential greening initiatives (Project lead: Kororoit Creek Neighbourhood House).

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Mapping relationships and links between CHCSOs

Surveys and interview responses were used to inform a social network analysis (SNA) of CHCSOs and related organisations working in the west. SNA is a method used to identify the actors within a network as well as their various roles, connections, and relationships with other actors in the network. Here, it was used as a tool to better understand key stakeholders supporting healthy and resilient communities in the context of climate change, as well as the nature of and structure of their existing relationships. Insights from these tools and shared priorities for action are detailed in this brief across four key areas of investigation:

- Formal collaboration for core services
- Formal collaboration for climate change, heat health, and related work
- Formal information sharing for core services
- Formal information sharing for climate change, heat health, and related work.

From the responses, we developed four maps to visually represent the network of organisations in relation to each relationship characteristic. As an example, **Figure 4.1** illustrates the formal collaboration between 28 organisations around climate change adaptation and/or heat health. Organisations with the greatest number of connections (such as Local Government 3) sit closer to the centre of the circle, and those with the least on the outside. Those organisations closer to the centre are also more likely to have roles funded for climate justice related work or staff within the organisation championing this work. As well, they are geographically located in areas with well-defined priorities around climate justice, such as the health impacts of heatwaves on low-income communities. A summary of findings across the four areas of inquiry are summarised in **Table 4.1**.

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Table 4.1 Summary of network mapping findings across the four lines of inquiry.

Formal collaboration for core services	Formal collaboration for climate change, heat health, and related work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government and neighbourhood houses are well-connected to community health and/or community service organisations, as well as those managing determinants of health (e.g. water authorities). • Because of the connectedness of local governments, organisations and coalitions who are well connected to local government have the potential for larger and more diverse reach across the network. • Questions of how to consider catchments and how to work together are evident here. This is largely due to the sharing of clients and cohorts across LGAs, and participation in networks beyond the five LGAs of interest. For example, considering the role of peak bodies in having unique expertise but not being located within the west of Melbourne. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community health organisations are more engaged in work that considers the intersections of health equity and climate change than community service organisations. • More community health organisations than community service organisations are involved in formal collaborations on climate change - this is potentially the result of the policy and legislative context in Victoria, which sets out a clear focus on health and climate change. • Community health and community service organisations are very well connected. However, participation in formal collaboration on climate change is largely directed by project-based funding/partnership opportunities or the personal interest of staff members.
Formal collaboration for core services	Formal collaboration for climate change, heat health, and related work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders (state and local government departments, Primary Health Networks, philanthropy etc) were named as key stakeholders that several organisations shared information with. • Information sharing with funders is generally for the purpose of monitoring, evaluation, and reporting for accountability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As with information sharing for core services, funders play a central role in information sharing on climate change related work. • Several organisations (community health and local government) are already playing a bridging role between organisations. Specifically, those with roles funded for work that considers the intersections of climate change impacts and health equity.

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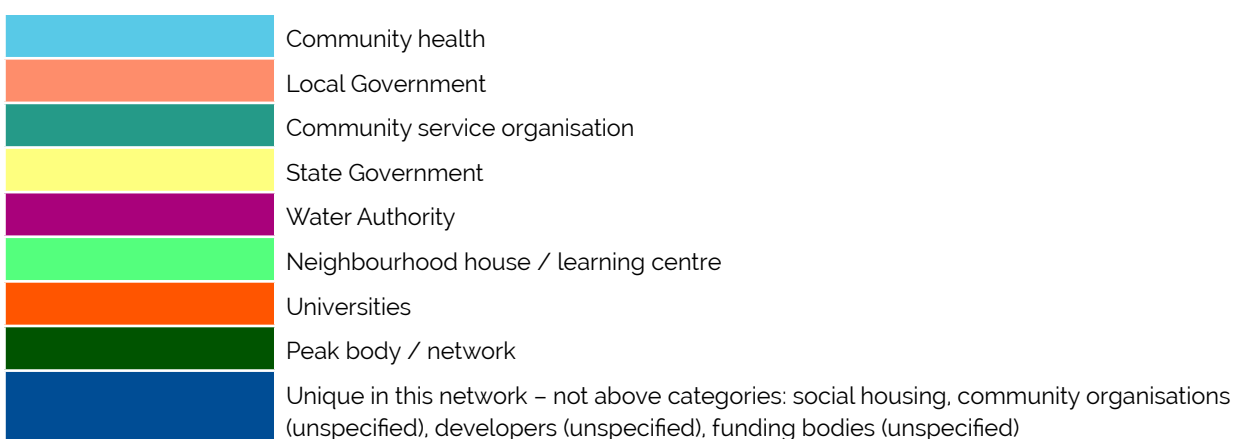
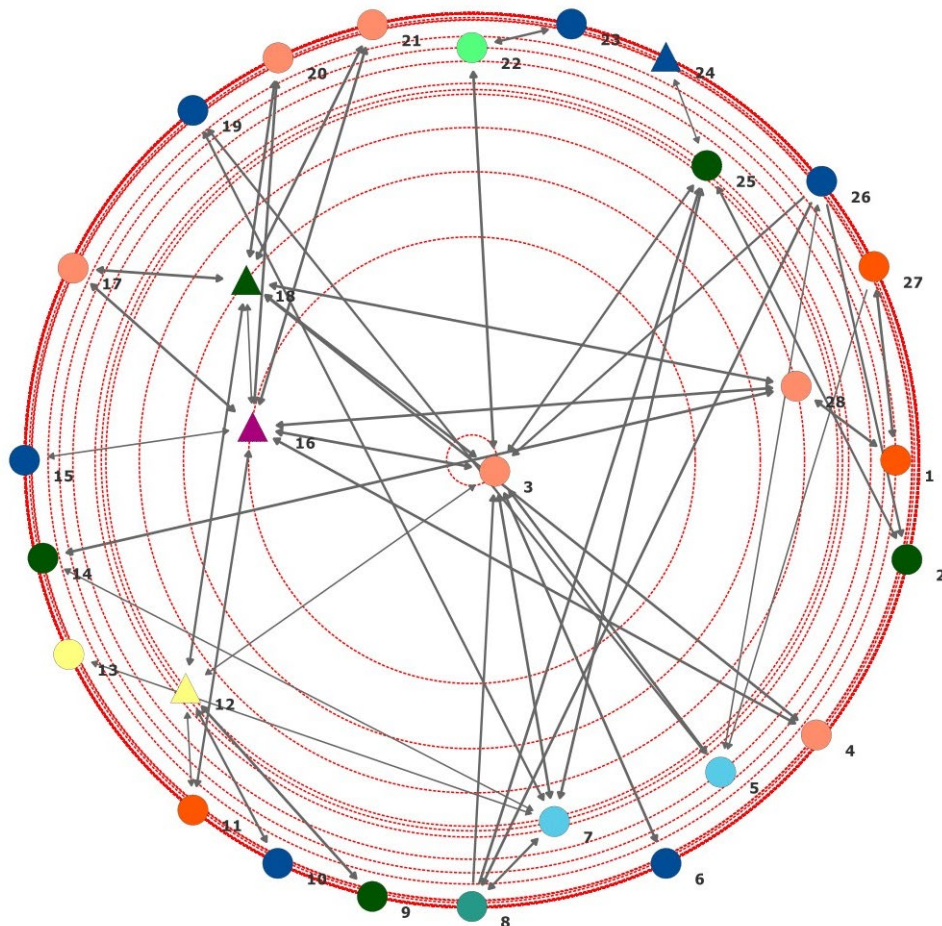


Figure 4.1 Mapping formal collaboration on heat health and/or climate change adaptation.

In this example, triangle nodes represent stakeholders with core functions in environment, energy, land, water, and planning (excluding local government, as their core functions also relate to health and wellbeing), with all other CHCSOs depicted as circles. Organisations with greater resourcing, connections, and priorities related to collaborating on climate justice sit closer to the centre of the circle. Source: Authors' representation based on survey and interview responses.

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Findings and emerging opportunities

What the surveys, interviews, and SNA analysis reveal is that CHCSOs have many unique connections and potential for diverse collaborations when shaping actions for climate justice. Leveraging the significant relationships held within certain organisations towards engagement and mobilisation around climate justice has several key considerations:

Key findings and considerations:

- **Organisations recognise the need for action** – There is recognition of climate change issues by organisations and an appetite to work collaboratively in different spaces, not just with organisations with the same core focus areas. However, there are gaps between this recognition and the resourcing and capacity to implement programs.
- **Bridging organisations** – Those organisations (including local governments, community health organisations, and neighbourhood houses) with funded roles for climate justice related work (dedicated roles or project-based roles) are the most connected in the climate justice space, and play a bridging role in sharing information on climate change related work.
- **Role of local government** – Local governments play a key role as connecting organisations. Organisations and coalitions who are well connected to local governments have the potential for larger and more diverse reach across the region.
- **Distribution of activities** – a focus on the intersections of climate change and health equity are more realised in the community health than the community services sector, where very little activity was identified. This could be influenced by existing and previous projects, such as the Hot Spots Initiative, led by community health organisations in the west.
- **Enabling environment** – More health organisations reported being involved in formal collaborations on climate change than community service organisations – this is potentially the result of the policy and legislative context in Victoria, which sets out a clear focus on health and climate change.
- **Catchment area** – Many CHCSOs (and the clients and cohorts they work with) work across LGA borders and in areas outside the currently defined region of the 'west of Melbourne'. In addition, many CHCSOs that hold expertise in the climate justice space are not based in 'the west of Melbourne'.

Key opportunities:

- **Support dedicated resources for climate related work** – Collaborative work on climate justice in the west can be supported through the inclusion of climate justice considerations and planning in organisational strategy and guiding documents, and the allocation of dedicated resourcing from state and local governments in particular.
- **Strengthen information sharing to facilitate learning** – Ensure that projects and initiatives are coordinated and complimentary across the sector, and learnings shared and distributed. so that others can learn and benefit from them (i.e. avoid reinventing the wheel).
- **Work in ways that reflect shifting geographies of the west** – There are benefits and constraints of working in particular geographic areas in collaborative work. Opportunities to join up information sharing, capacity building around adaptation planning and advocacy campaigns may be useful at a wider scale, while more targeted community-led approaches are better implemented at a local scale.

For further information:

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

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Suggested citation: Dunn, Katrina, Andrea Wolf, Susie Moloney, David Lansley, Thea Hewitt, Melek Cigdem-Bayram, and Haydie Gooder. *Mobilising Climate Just and Resilient Communities in Melbourne's West: Collaborative Action Plan*. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services, 2022.

Designer: Renae Portwine www.colourit.com.au

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