

Mobilising Climate Just and Resilient Communities in Melbourne's West

Collaborative Action Plan

Executive Summary - November 2022



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong, Wadawurrung, and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples as 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 in the west of Melbourne and beyond.

Mobilising Climate Just and Resilient Communities in Melbourne's West: Collaborative Action Plan

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation that has worked for 45 years to deliver practical support and advocate for improved policies to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play their role and flourish.

One of Jesuit Social Services' six pillars of work is **ecological justice** – which invites discussion on what practices, policies and actions can be taken by governments, individuals, organisations and the community services sector within Australia to build an ecologically just society.

In 2021, Jesuit Social Services established the Centre for Just Places, with seed funding from Gandel Foundation and the Victorian Government, to enable and support place-based approaches nationally through research, collaboration, engagement and knowledge exchange.

About this project

Across 2021-22, the Centre for Just Places worked with over 44 community health and community service organisations (CHCSOs) to reflect and build on the diverse contributions of individuals and organisations already working at the interface of climate change, health, and social justice.

The resultant Collaborative Action Plan outlines a shared vision for the actions required to mobilise CHCSOs around climate justice and community resilience in the west of Melbourne – defined as the local council areas of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton and Wyndham.

The Plan identifies where CHCSOs and communities are currently connected, what is needed to strengthen those connections, and the place-based collaboration and action required to support community members at greatest risk of climate change impacts.

The Plan seeks to further understand the localised and systemic drivers of climate change vulnerability for CHCSOs and the communities they work with in Melbourne's west, as well as the approaches and strategies to address these drivers.

For CHCSOs, and the communities themselves, this has critical implications, including:

- The ability to meet existing and future service needs as they are impacted by compounding and cascading events, such as heat waves and the rising cost-of living pressures
- The consequences for health and well-being outcomes and needs in a region that is rapidly growing and diversifying, and where demand for adequate infrastructure and services is outpacing provision.

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Why collaborative action on climate change and social justice?

Local, place-based responses to climate change are vital to addressing the intersections of climate change and health inequities.

CHCSOs as well as local governments form a critical part of social infrastructure, with knowledge and networks essential for responding to climate change and reducing risks.

However, the sector is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, posing risks of flow-on implications to the communities they work with and support.

This risks the health, safety and wellbeing of Victoria's largest workforce.

Heat, for example, poses a critical challenge for CHCSO's service infrastructure with many buildings and service delivery models not designed for current or projected climate impact.

It is critical that this sector is climate-resilient to help ensure that at-risk communities remain safe particularly as the needs that drive service demand become more complex under a changing climate.

Climate justice and health equity in Melbourne's west

Adopting a climate justice lens in community health and community service organisations requires a grasp of where climate change and social inequities are experienced in place.

Melbourne's west – spanning five municipalities – has experienced significant socio-economic and demographic shifts over the past decade due to a rapidly growing population and development particularly in the outer areas.

Newly urbanised areas in Brimbank, Melton and Wyndham are at high risk from heat waves, intensified by a lack of vegetation cover and socioeconomic factors that undermine people's capacities to thrive and stay safe.

Specific health risks for Melbourne's west include:

- Communities in Brimbank who experience different forms of disadvantage have had amongst the highest rates of COVID-19 deaths, disproportionately impacting people from migrant backgrounds
- Brimbank, Melton, Maribyrnong and Wyndham have an average summer urban heat island (UHI) reading 8 to 11 degrees hotter than non-urban areas
- Heatwaves can significantly impact populations and areas experiencing higher socio-economic vulnerability such as St Albans, Tarneit and Altona North
- Two of Victoria's air pollution 'hot spot' suburbs, Yarraville and Brooklyn, are located in the inner west and rank seventh and eighth in Australia for air pollution concentrations. This LGA, Hobsons Bay, also reports respiratory death rates higher than the state and national average
- It is estimated that there will be more than a 95 percent increase in the number of people aged over 70 by 2031. In the west, this growth is forecast to be concentrated in Brimbank, Melton, and Wyndham. More than 90 percent of people in this age bracket have two or more chronic conditions, with significant implications for health service demands.

Jesuit Social Services' 2021 *Dropping off the Edge* report, which includes over 37 indicators of disadvantage on multiple fronts including environmental risk, shows that the west also experiences significant challenges in terms of overcrowding and housing stress.

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

As part of this project, the Centre for Just Places consulted with and interviewed CHCSOs, local and state government departments, water authorities, philanthropic funders, and community centres.

It found a number of barriers, including policy and legislative restraints, to collaborative relationships including:

- Competing organisational priorities that mean for most, climate change impacts and climate justice are not seen as an organisational core focus
- Lack of dedicated resourcing for action on climate justice which limits capacity to take part in collaborative work due to limitations in staff time and funding
- Funding for climate change responses decreased in the last Victorian state budget, with limited funding to climate change adaptation. Total spend on climate change was decreased by 40 percent in the 2022-23 budget.

Findings and emerging opportunities

Through a group model building process, a coalition of organisations was able to identify and prioritise actions, such as:

- Strengthening connections between organisations and services
- Value and resource the role of the community sector in building resilient communities
- The need to learn from and involve diverse knowledge and experiences
- The need for evidence-based and accountable actions.

A framework for collaborative action on climate justice

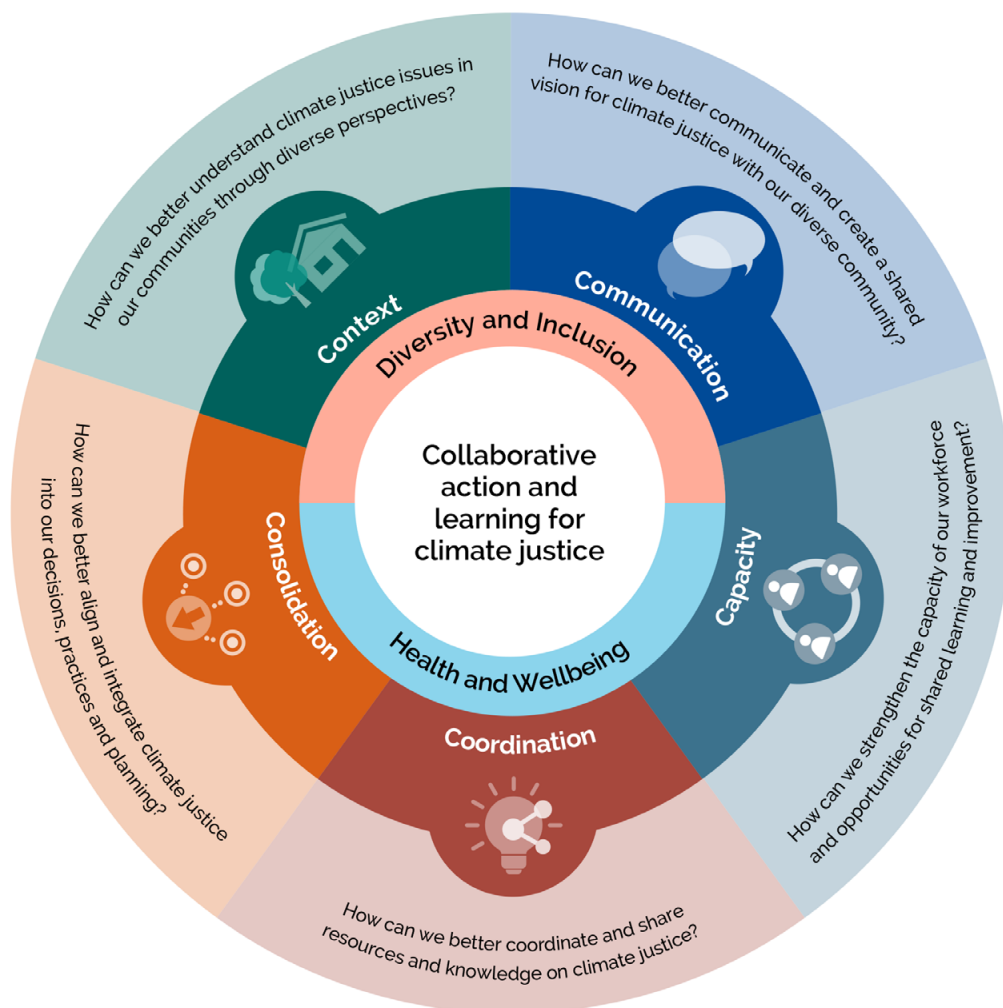
Insights from across the project underscore an urgent need to mobilise around climate justice in the west of Melbourne.

CHCSOs are realising that, whether planned for or not, climate change is already impacting their services and their communities and is increasingly a core part of their work.

While there are distinct considerations for climate justice in the west of Melbourne, there is a range of expertise and knowledge that can be leveraged to ensure that we are collectively working towards health and wellbeing outcomes for all and particularly for those most at risk to climate change.

The Collaborative Action Plan has five focus areas to guide future work on climate justice in Melbourne's west. These focus areas reflect the needs and opportunities identified by organisations who participated throughout the project process.

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The five focus areas to drive action on climate justice are:

- **Context** - ensure that understandings of climate justice are situated within the social and physical context of the west and reflect the diverse perspectives, priorities and activities of the region
- **Communication** - draw from the wealth of experience and knowledge within the west to communicate a shared voice and vision for climate justice, to strengthen advocacy and dialogue between organisations and communities alike
- **Capacity** - strengthen workforce arrangements that build capacity and contributions towards climate justice, including the need for learning and continuous improvement
- **Coordination** - enhance the coordination of resources and knowledge sharing on climate justice, in a way that builds trust and leverages the diverse expertise within the region
- **Consolidation** - align efforts cross-sectorally and cross-regionally to support the consolidation and integration of climate justice in organisational practices and planning, and enhance accountability for decisions, actions and outcomes

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What's next?

This Collaborative Action Plan, which was co-designed by a wide range of organisations, demonstrates the critical need to mobilise and support collaborative action on climate justice in the west of Melbourne.

The framework provides a starting point for practitioners, community leaders, funders, and government agencies to leverage existing efforts for advocacy and strategic planning around climate justice.

If collectively owned and applied across the region, this framework is intended to support the many diverse actors striving for transformative change in the west, and is a foundation for the critical conversations required for achieving systemic change.

With many CHCSOs still at the frontline of COVID-19 responses and impacts, and with a scaling back of Victoria's pandemic and climate change funding, this is also a call for relevant authorities to recognise and resource the critical work of the sector and to focus on prevention and mitigation of climate risk to achieve transformative change for the region.

For more information about this project or to receive a copy of the full Collaborative Action Plan, please contact Susie Moloney, Executive Director, Centre for Just Places: Susie.Moloney@jss.org.au.

To learn more about the Centre for Just Places and our climate adaptation and resilience work, please [visit our website](#).

