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Action to address climate change and health must include a focus on place-based approaches: Jesuit Social Services

With COP28 expected to raise the profile of the relationship between climate change and health, our leaders must ensure a commitment to the integration of health equity and social justice into climate change policy and finance, through strong supports for community-led approaches, says Jesuit Social Services.

“In Australia, policy responses to climate change are often siloed. With the current development of Australia’s first National Health and Climate Strategy and COP28’s new dedicated Health Day, there is an opportunity for the Federal Government to recognise the crucial intersection between climate change and health. Investment in a just transition away from fossil fuels and adequate adaptation measures that prioritise place-based approaches will ensure communities most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change are both protected and empowered,” says Director of Jesuit Social Services’ Centre for Just Places, Dr John Ryks.

At COP28, a political declaration will be adopted to reflect country priorities on climate change and health and support the integration of health in the climate agenda.

“There is a risk that this declaration will inspire largely top-down approaches that are limited to the healthcare sector, and neglect investment in cross-sectoral and community-led climate change responses. Local people and organisations on the frontline of the health and social impacts of climate change have deep knowledge of community strengths, needs and opportunities. We need the right mix of ambitious national leadership, strong climate policy, and adequate place-based investment to ensure just and equitable health, social and environmental outcomes for current and future generations,” Dr Ryks says.

Jesuit Social Services’ most recent report into locational disadvantage across Australia, *Dropping off the Edge 2021*, reveals the interconnected nature of social and ecological disadvantage, finding that many of the most disadvantaged communities across Australia are already grappling with climate-related health challenges such as heat stress and poor air quality.

“Adding environmental risk indicators - including heat vulnerability and air pollution – to our existing social indicators did not change the communities we identified as experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage in *Dropping off the Edge 2021*. Rather it gave us further insight into the complex web of challenges they are experiencing,” Dr Ryks says.

The COP28 thematic program aims to unite a diverse range of stakeholders around solutions to limit warming to 1.5 degrees, build resilience, and mobilize finance at scale.

Jesuit Social Services’ Centre for Just Places is working across Australia with local governments, local leaders and community services and health organisations to enable effective place-based approaches to address complex disadvantage, health and wellbeing, and climate justice. In 2022, the Centre published a [Collaborative Action Plan](#) – a shared vision for mobilising climate justice in the



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west of Melbourne – resulting from collaborative work with other 44 community health and community service organisations, and the first plan of its kind in Australia.

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