

Evidence Review

Lessons in Resilience

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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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

Communities in Melbourne's west have navigated a series of overlapping climate and public health disruptions in recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, flooding, and recurrent heatwaves. These events have exposed the uneven impacts of climate-related hazards while also demonstrating the strength of local social infrastructure. Community service and health organisations (CSHOs) have been central to these responses providing essential support during crises and contributing to the foundations of longer-term resilience.

This evidence review synthesises evidence from 2019–2025 on resilience initiatives involving CSHOs in the region. Across the literature, a clear pattern emerges; resilience is built through community-led, place-based practice supported by trusted relationships, cultural knowledge, and local networks. Neighbourhood houses, volunteers, and other community hubs operate as critical local infrastructure, enabling connection, coordination, and support during both acute shocks and ongoing stresses.

The most effective initiatives share several characteristics:

- Strong social capital and volunteer engagement
- Community hubs functioning as trusted resilience infrastructure
- Cross-sector collaboration across community, health, and emergency services
- Flexible, context-specific approaches tailored to local needs.

These activities span immediate response and early recovery as well as longer-term preparedness and prevention, demonstrating deep community knowledge and organisational capability. At the same time, the review identifies systemic challenges

that limit the equity and effectiveness of resilience efforts. These include chronic under-resourcing of the community sector, reliance on volunteer labour, fragmented systems, and inequitable access to timely and culturally appropriate information. These constraints reflect structural conditions rather than community shortcomings.

Based on this evidence review, it is evident that strengthening climate resilience in Melbourne's west will require:

- Long-term, equitable funding models
- Proactive investment in preparedness and community leadership
- Support for community-led and place-based initiatives
- Structural backing for cross-sector collaboration
- Mechanisms that embed community voices and experiences in planning and decision-making.

Embedding social and climate justice principles in resilience planning is essential to improving health and social equity and ensuring communities, particularly those facing systemic disadvantage, can better withstand and recover from climate-related disruptions.

1. Background

1.1 Overview of the Lessons in Resilience Project

The *Lessons in Resilience* project was led by Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places, in collaboration with Wyndham City Council and the Western Public Health Unit (WPHU). The project is supported by Australian Multicultural Community Services, cohealth, GenWest, Network West, the Victorian Council of Social Service, Victoria University, and Wyndham Park Community Centre.

This initiative built on the Centre for Just Places' previous climate justice work in Melbourne's west, including *Mobilising Climate Just and Resilient Communities in Melbourne's West* and *Climate Resilient Neighbourhoods in Melbourne's West*. This project aims to strengthen the connections, capabilities and collective readiness of the community and health sectors in Melbourne's west. Its purpose is to better equip these sectors to support the people and places most vulnerable to significant shocks and stressors, including extreme weather driven by climate change.

The project comprises three core components:

1. An evidence review synthesising local research, grey literature, and community narratives to inform the project's approach, guide the selection of case studies, and shape the final project report and associated outputs.
2. Case study research examining how CSHOs in Melbourne's west adapted their services and operations to meet community needs during disaster and extreme weather events between 2019 and 2025; and
3. A final report consolidating key lessons in resilience emerging from the evidence and case studies.

Through this work, the project explores how organisational knowledge, relationships, and social infrastructure contributed to effective responses during recent shocks. It identifies the conditions that enable community organisations to act as resilience anchors - supporting communities to anticipate, withstand, and recover from shocks and stressors while also addressing the systemic drivers of vulnerability. These insights will inform future practice, programs, and policy to strengthen climate justice-centred resilience across Melbourne's west.



1.2 Defining resilience

This evidence review adopts a contemporary understanding of resilience as a multidimensional process that enables communities, institutions, and systems to anticipate, absorb, adapt and transform in response to shocks and stressors. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines resilience as the capacity of a system or society “to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover” from hazards while maintaining essential functions.¹ This definition provides a consistent baseline for interpreting evidence across diverse sectors and disciplines.

Developments in resilience theory underline that resilience is not only about maintaining stability but also about fostering adaptability and transformability within interconnected social-ecological systems.² Evidence also highlights important conceptual tensions, resilience “for whom, what, when and why”, which must be considered to avoid interpretations that inadvertently reinforce inequities.³ This review therefore evaluates evidence with explicit attention to differential vulnerability, distributional impacts, and the conditions that support equitable resilience.

A key theme in the literature is the shift from seeing resilience as “bouncing back” to viewing it as an opportunity to “bounce forward”, using disruption as a catalyst for addressing underlying structural risks and social inequalities.⁴ This aligns with the findings of the IPCC, which concludes that resilience and adaptation efforts are most effective when they prioritise equity, inclusion, and justice, as communities already experiencing structural and systemic disadvantage bear disproportionate climate impacts.⁵

Accordingly, this evidence review examines the extent to which resilience-building programs and practice (across community, organisational and system levels) in Melbourne’s west support not only risk reduction but also transformational changes that enhance wellbeing, fairness, and long-term sustainability. The following sections synthesise the local evidence base to identify core principles, effective practices, and conditions that enable resilient and just outcomes.

1 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) 2017
2 Folke et al., 2016; Folke, 2016
3 Meerow and Newell, 2019
4 Manyena et al., 2011; Pelling, 2011
5 IPCC, 2022

2. Scope and methodology

This evidence review synthesises existing research on organisational and community-based responses in Melbourne’s west to the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme weather events, and broader climate change impacts, with a particular focus on health and social equity, and the experiences of communities facing disadvantage.

The review covers five local government areas: Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, and Wyndham. Sources published between January 2019 and June 2025 were included.

The search strategy combined keyword searches in publicly accessible search engines with manual review of websites belonging to local governments, community health organisations, community service organisations, and specialised research centres. Search terms paired the names of the five LGAs with concepts such as *health equity*, *climate change*, *COVID-19 response*, *extreme weather*, *community resilience*, *organisational resilience*, and *disaster resilience*. For the purposes of this review, councils were classified as CSHOs (see [Table 1](#)).

In total, 70 sources were reviewed: 13 peer-reviewed articles, 31 pieces of grey literature, and 26 webpages from relevant agencies. Webpages were included to capture community-level responses that are often documented informally and may not appear in formal publications. Many CSHOs have limited capacity for extensive monitoring and evaluation,⁶ making these online accounts an important source of insight. Highlighting such work aligns with the broader purpose of the *Lessons in Resilience* project and informed the selection and focus of subsequent case study interviews. Where appropriate, sources from outside the immediate geographic scope were also considered.



6 Callis et al. 2019, 3; Wyndham City Council 2024, 8.

Table 1: Summary of evidence review methodology

Local government areas	Keyword search	Number of sources	Time range	Data priority
Brimbank	<i>health equity</i>	70 (total)	January 2019 to June 2025	Webpages and other informal sources to capture community and organisational response
Hobsons Bay	<i>climate change</i>	13 peer-reviewed articles		
Maribyrnong	<i>COVID-19 response</i>	31 pieces of grey literature		
Melton	<i>extreme weather</i>	26 webpages		
Wyndham	<i>community resilience</i>			
	<i>organisational resilience</i>			
	<i>disaster resilience</i>			

Rationale for including COVID-19 pandemic responses

Including COVID-19 pandemic responses within this evidence review recognises the pandemic as a major systemic disruption that tested organisational capacity, coordination, and equity across Melbourne’s west. The crisis required rapid adaptation, sustained cross sector collaboration, continuity of essential services, and targeted support for communities experiencing disproportionate impacts. Examining these responses provides valuable insight into how institutions respond under pressure, revealing both strengths and structural inequities, and offering important lessons for advancing climate resilience in ways that centre justice and reduce existing disadvantage.

3. Findings and discussion

The following sections present the findings of the evidence review in a structured way that reflects both the diversity of resilience activity in Melbourne’s west and the systemic conditions that shape it. The analysis is organised into three parts. First, a typology outlines the different forms of resilience responses identified across the literature. Second, a set of thematic insights synthesises the recurring patterns, strengths, and dynamics that characterise resilience practice in the region. Third, a section on challenges in practice examines the structural and systemic factors that constrain the effectiveness and equity of these efforts. Together, these components provide a coherent picture of how resilience is currently enacted, where it is being limited by broader systems, and what this means for future climate resilience planning in Melbourne’s west.

3.1 Typology of resilience responses in the evidence review

Overview

Across the reviewed literature, no single, consistent definition of resilience was evident. Some CSHOs explicitly framed their work as resilience-building, specifying types such as community, climate, or urban resilience. Others did not use the term, despite their initiatives aligning with recognised resilience functions when assessed against established frameworks and definitions.

Disaster resilience is commonly conceptualised through four interrelated stages: response and relief, recovery, prevention, and preparedness.⁷ However, the evidence shows that real-world practice rarely fits neatly into these categories. Responses often span multiple stages and unfold over extended timeframes - for example, relief efforts may last days or weeks, while recovery can extend across months or years.⁸ Many initiatives evolve from short-term crisis responses into longer-term resilience strategies.

Given this complexity, this review organises resilience responses into two broad categories:

1. Short-term responses: response, relief, and early recovery
2. Long-term responses: ongoing recovery, prevention, and preparedness.

This structure reflects how organisations in Melbourne’s west have adapted, scaled, and sustained resilience practices over time.

Range of response types

Across all stages of the resilience cycle, organisations implemented a diverse set of actions, varying in scale, formality, and resource intensity. These included:

- Formal programs and targeted initiatives
- Community-led groups and informal networks
- Inter-agency committees and collaborative structures
- Community events, workshops, and outreach activities
- Organisational plans, strategies, and guidance materials developed by CSHOs and local government.

This diversity reflects the region’s strong social infrastructure and the capacity of organisations to mobilise rapidly while also investing in longer-term resilience building.

7 Manne 2025, 10.

8 Resilient Community Organisations n.d.

Short-term responses: Response, relief, and early recovery

Short-term adaptive responses refer to the rapid actions taken by CSHOs to meet urgent needs during acute shocks. These responses are characterised by agility, improvisation, and the mobilisation of trusted relationships and existing assets. They include:

- Rapid dissemination of information through established community networks
- Reallocation of staff and resources to priority needs

- Adaptation of service delivery models (e.g., shifting to phone or online formats)
- Activation or updating of legislated emergency and recovery plans
- Establishment of new programs to address immediate gaps.

These actions typically occur over hours, days, or weeks, but in some cases lay the groundwork for longer-term resilience strategies. Examples are summarised in [Table 2](#).



Table 2: Short-term response

Shock	Response	Overview
COVID-19 pandemic	Bi-cultural Workers and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities Outreach Program	<p>Area: Wyndham City Council.</p> <p>Lead: Wyndham City Council.</p> <p>This program was developed in recognition of the high proportion of COVID-19 cases in Wyndham City Council and a lack of culturally accessible information in the State’s response.⁹</p> <p>Wyndham City Council engaged and provided content and support for local CALD community leaders to develop communication plans that were tailored to their community.¹⁰</p>
	COVID Positive Care Pathways program	<p>Area: State-wide.</p> <p>Lead: Department of Health; cohealth in Melbourne’s west.</p> <p>Providers contacted all Victorians who tested positive to assess needs; make clinical referrals where needed; and support self-isolation, including offering housing and financial supports where needed.¹¹ The program ran until June 2023.</p>
	High-Risk Accommodation Response (HRAR)	<p>Area: State-wide.</p> <p>Lead: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH); delivered by cohealth in Melbourne’s west.</p> <p>The HRAR program was established by DFFH and ran from September 2020 to June 2022 to support prevention, preparedness and responses to the heightened risk of COVID-19 transmission in ‘high-risk’ residential settings.¹² Risk was defined based on density and shared facilities and the response included residents of public housing, community housing and supported residential services.¹³</p> <p>cohealth delivered the response in Melbourne’s north and west, which included programs that worked onsite at high-rise estates to support residents’ access to health information; health services including vaccinations; and community-strengthening activities.¹⁴</p> <p>cohealth’s programs at high-rise estates in Melbourne’s west included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Concierges Footscray; as well as Kensington, North Melbourne, Flemington, Carlton, Fitzroy, Collingwood. cohealth employed public housing residents as ‘Health Concierges’. This role included monitoring the health and wellbeing of residents entering and exiting the building; taking temperatures; providing Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) and masks; sharing in-language health information and restriction updates; and referring residents with symptoms to local testing sites and health/support services.¹⁵ The Health Concierges also co-designed a webpage with community containing COVID-19 community resources and information in Simple English and translated into key languages.¹⁶

9 Wyndham City Council 2024, 55.

10 Wyndham City Council 2024, 55.

11 cohealth 2020a; cohealth 2020c, 2; Department of Health and Human Services 2021.

12 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing 2022b, 6.

13 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing 2022b, 6.

14 cohealth 2022a; cohealth 2022b.

15 cohealth 2020b; cohealth 2022a; cohealth 2022b.

16 cohealth 2020b.

Shock	Response	Overview
COVID-19 pandemic	High-Risk Accommodation Response (HRAR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter Wellbeing Expo Williamstown; as well as Flemington, North Melbourne. From June 6th–19th 2022, cohealth held a Winter Wellbeing Expo as a health promotion and community-strengthening event to promote post-COVID social and emotional recovery.¹⁷ Expo activities included tai chi, boxing, pottery classes, dance workshops, small business advice sessions and journalling workshops.¹⁸ • cohealth’s HRAR response also included participation in the consortium of community health organisations (alongside IPC Health, DPV, EACH and Star Health) that rolled out ‘Rapid Response Testing’ teams at schools, factories and abattoirs.¹⁹
	Local Public Health Units (LPHUs)	<p>Area: State-wide.</p> <p>Lead: Department of Health; Western Public Health Unit (WPHU) in Melbourne’s west.</p> <p>In 2020, the Department of Health established nine LPHUs across Victoria to help manage local COVID-19 outbreaks and cases. This included the Western Public Health Unit (WPHU), which covers eight local government areas including Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton and Wyndham.</p>
	Melton Community Connector Hubs	<p>Area: Melton.</p> <p>Lead: Melton City Council.</p> <p>Melton City Council established Community Connector Hubs at Timbertop Community Centre, which ran from May 2020 to August 2021.²⁰ The Hubs provided local residents with food and care packages; financial wellbeing and pre-employment support; and face-to-face social connection with local community.²¹</p>
	Melton Health Champions	<p>Area: Melton.</p> <p>Lead: Melton City Council and the Western Bulldogs Community Foundation.</p> <p>This initiative worked to support COVID-19 information sharing among CALD communities in Melbourne’s west. Forty-seven CALD young people from Melton City Council were recruited and engaged in online and in-person meetings over a four-month period between 2020 and 2021 to learn about local community services and build local community networks.²²</p>

17 cohealth 2020b.

18 cohealth 2020b.

19 cohealth 2020a; cohealth 2021.

20 Melton City Council 2021, 11.

21 Melton City Council 2021, 11.

22 Victoria University 2021.

Shock	Response	Overview
2022 flooding events	Maribyrnong Community Recovery Committee (CRC)	<p>Area: Maribyrnong.</p> <p>Lead: Maribyrnong City Council.</p> <p>The Maribyrnong City Council established the Community Recovery Committee (CRC) in April 2023 in response to the Maribyrnong River flood. The CRC's role was to support and advise Council on recovery barriers and needs in the flood's aftermath, including the development of a flood recovery plan and resilience strategies and programs.²³ Committee members included support services and recovery agencies.²⁴</p> <p>Alongside the CRC, three sub-committees were also established to support each other's work via information sharing.²⁵ These included a Social Recovery Sub-Committee; a Built and Natural Environment Sub-Committee; and an Economic Recovery Sub-Committee.</p>
	Maribyrnong Flood Insurance Guide	<p>Area: Maribyrnong.</p> <p>Lead: GenWest in partnership with Maribyrnong City Council.</p> <p>The Flood Insurance Guide was developed in response to feedback from the CRC, its sub-committees and community members indicating that insurance acts as both a key barrier to flood recovery and exacerbates the trauma of displacement.²⁶ The Guide is available in English and Vietnamese.</p>
	Our Community, Our Voice	<p>Area: Maribyrnong.</p> <p>Lead: GenWest.</p> <p>The Our Community, Our Voice project was developed in recognition of the disproportionate impact of disaster events on women, and particularly women from refugee and migrant backgrounds. It involved community events and consultation with flood-affected migrant and refugee women to understand and share in lived experience, identify community need and build capacity.²⁷ These insights were compiled into the 'Our Community, Our Voice: Lessons from the 2022 Maribyrnong Flood' report.²⁸</p>
	Tenancy Stress Victoria Pilot	<p>Area: Flood-affected areas in western Melbourne, Loddon and Goulburn.²⁹</p> <p>Lead: Victorian Government.</p> <p>The Tenancy Stress Victoria Pilot ran from 2022–23 to provide wrap-around social work, financial and legal counselling to renters in flood-affected parts of the state.³⁰ It was modelled on the Westjustice Mortgage Stress Victoria program and delivered by Westjustice in western Melbourne.³¹</p>

23 Maribyrnong City Council n.d.b, 1.

24 GenWest 2025: 5.

25 Maribyrnong City Council n.d.b, 2.

26 GenWest 2025, 5.

27 Women's Health Services Network n.d.

28 GenWest 2024.

29 Department of Premier and Cabinet 2024, 10.

30 Department of Premier and Cabinet 2024, 10.

31 Latham 2023, 22.

Shock	Response	Overview
Extreme weather	Energy Info Hubs	<p>Area: Collingwood; Fitzroy.</p> <p>Lead: cohealth.</p> <p>In response to feedback to Health Concierges about the stress of high heating bills for people on low incomes, cohealth established an 'Energy Info Hub' as part of its HRAR response.³² The Hub ran in advance of winter (March and April) 2022 and involved consultants working directly with residents to help them access energy concessions and more affordable energy plans, as well as improve their financial literacy.³³</p>
	Pop-up Heat Relief Hub	<p>Area: City of Melbourne.</p> <p>Lead: cohealth.</p> <p>cohealth re-employed a 'hub' approach in summer 2024 in anticipation of high temperatures and as part of Melbourne's heat action strategy. The Pop-up Heat Relief Hub was located on Bourke Street and offered walk-in access to health workers, cold refreshments and ice packs. The hub was open to all but intended to target people experiencing homelessness, people living in poor housing, international students and elderly people.</p>

³² cohealth 2022a.

³³ cohealth 2022a.

Longer-term responses: recovery, prevention, preparedness

Longer-term resilience-building approaches involve sustained efforts to strengthen community capacity, address chronic stresses, and reduce future risk. These initiatives often emerge from lessons learned during short-term responses and reflect a shift from crisis management to systemic adaptation. They include:

- Embedding resilience principles into organisational strategies and local government planning
- Developing programs that address underlying drivers of vulnerability (e.g., social isolation, housing insecurity, energy hardship)

- Strengthening cross-sector partnerships and governance structures
- Investing in community-led initiatives and local knowledge systems
- Building preparedness for future events through training, scenario planning, and resource development.

These approaches unfold over months or years and contribute to the region’s ability to “bounce forward” - transforming systems and practices to support more equitable, climate-resilient futures. Examples are outlined in [Table 3](#).

Table 3: Long-term responses

Response	Overview
Our Community, Our Voice	<p>Area: Maribyrnong; Melton; Wyndham.</p> <p>Lead: GenWest.</p> <p>The <i>Our Community, Our Voice</i> initiative has now been expanded in scope and geographic reach. GenWest’s program works to support climate resilience and disaster preparedness for refugee and migrant women (and families) in Maribyrnong as well as Melton and Wyndham.³⁴ It involves bringing community members together to share stories and resilience, and support access to services that support preparedness, response and recovery.³⁵ It also employs a peer-to-peer delivery model, where a bilingual and culturally competent workforce partners with community leaders and cultural groups.³⁶</p>

34 GenWest n.d.

35 GenWest n.d.

36 GenWest n.d.

Response	Overview
Community Connectors program	<p>Area: State-wide.</p> <p>Lead: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).</p> <p>In recognition of HRAR’s success, DFFH commissioned the Victorian Healthcare Association to develop a program to scale and embed the HRAR model.³⁷ The proposed program was presented in March 2022.³⁸</p> <p>In July 2022, the Victorian Government announced its funding of a new ‘Community Connectors’ program.³⁹ This program aims to provide “preventative and early intervention health and social care services” to Victorians living in public housing and low cost and high-risk accommodation settings.⁴⁰ It is comprised of two components: a ‘High-Rise Public Housing Community Connector Initiative’ for high-rise public housing communities in Metropolitan Melbourne; and a ‘Mobile Priority Community Connector Initiative’ providing mobile services in rural and regional Victoria.⁴¹</p>
Local Public Health Units (LPHUs)	<p>Area: State-wide.</p> <p>Lead: Department of Health; WPHU in Melbourne’s west.</p> <p>In July 2022, the scope of Victoria’s nine LPHUs was broadened to include additional public health responsibilities, including population health, disease prevention and responses to additional notifiable conditions.⁴²</p> <p>WPHU since does broader health protection and promotion work with a focus on health equity.⁴³</p>

A growing recognition of the increasing and compounding stresses facing Melbourne’s west has prompted both CSHOs and local governments to shift beyond post-disaster recovery toward proactive, long-term resilience-building. This shift reflects an understanding that resilience is not only about responding to crises, but about strengthening the systems, relationships, and capacities that enable communities to anticipate, withstand, and adapt to future shocks—particularly those driven by climate change.

Across the region, CSHOs and councils have increasingly focused on prevention and preparedness, addressing the chronic stresses that heighten vulnerability and embedding resilience principles into everyday practice. This includes strengthening social infrastructure, investing in community-led initiatives, and integrating climate justice and health equity into organisational strategies.

37 Victorian Healthcare Association 2022b.

38 Victorian Healthcare Association 2022b.

39 Victorian Healthcare Association 2022a.

40 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing 2022a.

41 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing 2022a; Victorian Healthcare Association 2022a.

42 Victorian Department of Health 2023.

43 Western Public Health Unit 2022, 4.

Local government responses

Councils in Melbourne’s west have played a significant role in advancing this proactive agenda. Several councils have developed frameworks and plans that go well beyond their legislated emergency management requirements, embedding resilience, climate justice, and health equity into long-term strategic planning. Examples include:

Brimbank City Council:

- Resilient Brimbank Framework 2018—2022
- Brimbank Climate Emergency Plan 2020—2025

Hobsons Bay City Council:

- Response to Climate Change Action Plan

Maribyrnong City Council:

- Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) 2021—2025
- Air Quality Improvement Action Plan 2022
- Maribyrnong Social Justice Framework 2023—2033

Melton City Council:

- City of Melton Climate Change Adaptation Plan

Wyndham City Council:

- Resilient Wyndham

These plans demonstrate a growing commitment to embedding resilience across policy domains such as climate adaptation, public health, social justice, and urban planning. Notably, Maribyrnong City Council has incorporated climate justice and health equity into its *Social Justice Framework*,⁴⁴ and its *Air Quality Improvement Action Plan* is the first of its kind developed by a local government authority in Victoria.⁴⁵ Wyndham City Council’s *Resilient Wyndham* builds on the *Resilient Melbourne* strategy (developed under the *100 Resilient Cities* initiative), adopting a strong focus on urban resilience and systems level adaptation.⁴⁶

This local leadership is occurring alongside a growing number of Australian councils that are declaring a climate emergency,⁴⁷ including Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay in Melbourne’s west.

Community service and health organisation responses

Beyond formal strategies and plans, both local governments and CSHOs have implemented a wide range of proactive resilience-building activities. These initiatives aim to strengthen community capacity, reduce exposure to chronic stresses, and prepare for future climate-related events. Examples include community education programs, cross-sector partnerships, neighbourhood-based resilience initiatives, and investments in social infrastructure.

A detailed list of these activities and interventions is provided in [Table 4](#).

44 Maribyrnong City Council 2024.

45 Maribyrnong City Council n.d.d.

46 Wyndham City Council 2021, 15.

47 Chou 2021.

Table 4: Proactive responses

Shock	Response	Overview
Flooding events	Maribyrnong Community Recovery Committee (CRC) Community Preparedness Day	<p>Area: Maribyrnong.</p> <p>Lead: Maribyrnong City Council.</p> <p>This event took place in June 2025 as one of various actions developed to support the priority of preparedness as identified by the CRC.⁴⁸ It involved family-friendly stalls and activities for residents to learn about emergency preparedness, access relevant resources, and connect with key organisations with roles in flood and storm planning and preparedness.⁴⁹</p>
	Maribyrnong flood recovery and prevention advocacy	<p>Area: Maribyrnong.</p> <p>Lead: Maribyrnong City Council.</p> <p>Maribyrnong City Council is seeking state and federal government support to address ongoing impacts of the 2022 Maribyrnong flood and strengthen prevention efforts for future floods.⁵⁰ This includes five advocacy priorities which encompass resilient building programs, insurance, early warning systems, flood mitigation infrastructure and understanding economic impact.⁵¹</p>
Extreme weather	Hotspots Initiative	<p>Area: City of Brimbank and City of Greater Dandenong.</p> <p>Lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Brimbank: IPC Health, in partnership with Brimbank City Council, cohealth, HealthWest PCP; Victoria Police; Ambulance Victoria; Australian Red Cross.⁵² • City of Greater Dandenong: Enliven. • City of Melbourne: cohealth. <p>The Hotspots Initiative enabled place-based, cross-sectoral collaborations to support areas and communities in Melbourne that are most at risk during heatwaves.⁵³</p> <p>It commenced with two pilot projects in the 2018-19 summer which were delivered by community health organisations, with a focus on building connections and identifying need among vulnerable community members and local government and community-based organisations.⁵⁴ The IPC Health pilot in the City of Brimbank comprised two stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep Cool in Summer campaign: consultation with community groups experiencing heat vulnerability and the organisations supporting them to understand experiences and needs.⁵⁵

48 Maribyrnong City Council 2025.

49 Maribyrnong City Council 2025.

50 Maribyrnong City Council n.d.c.

51 Maribyrnong City Council n.d.c.

52 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 5.

53 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 4.

54 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 4.

55 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 5.

Shock	Response	Overview
Extreme weather	Hotspots Initiative	<p>2. Cross-sectoral collaborations: in response to needs identified in Stage 1, IPC Health supported organisations' heat health messaging to reach vulnerable community members. This included the Keep Cool youth project with Brimbank City Council Youth Services; and the CroakeyGo event which brought together local stakeholders to discuss how they can support community members' health during heat events.⁵⁶ The CroakeyGo event was particularly impactful in building community understanding and networks in the heat health space.⁵⁷</p> <p>In the 2019-20 summer a third Hotspots pilot was introduced for public housing estates in the City of Melbourne.⁵⁸</p>
	Greening The West	<p>Area: Brimbank; Hobsons Bay; Maribyrnong; Melton; Wyndham; Hume; Moonee Valley; Melbourne; Yarra.</p> <p>Lead: Greening The West Steering Committee (comprising state government agencies, local governments and other affiliates and community partners).</p> <p>Greening The West is a regional alliance of state and local government agencies and water corporations to increase urban green space in western Melbourne.⁵⁹ The initiative was established in 2011 and in 2020 released its 2020-25 Strategy. Intended outcomes of the Strategy included increasing climate change adaptation, heatwave mitigation and community outdoor activity.⁶⁰</p>
	Brimbank Oases	<p>Area: Brimbank.</p> <p>Lead: Brimbank City Council, in partnership with Greater Western Water; Melbourne Water; Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action; Department of Education.</p> <p>The Brimbank Oases project sets out to increase green spaces in Brimbank 'hot spots' and hence support urban cooling. Dempster Park in Sunshine North has been the first upgraded oasis.⁶¹</p>
	Managing resilient urban greenspaces in Australian cities	<p>Area: Western Melbourne (Wyndham) and western Sydney.</p> <p>Lead: Urban Transformations Research Centre (Western Sydney University), in partnership with state and local government agencies (including Wyndham City Council).</p> <p>This project is developing three best practice guides for local and state government agencies, urban planners and emergency management bodies on the planning and management of public urban green spaces that are resilient to natural hazards.⁶²</p>
Bushfire	Safer Together Program	<p>Area: Regional Victoria.</p> <p>Lead: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.</p> <p>The Safer Together program leverages partnerships to reduce bushfire risk in Victoria. This work includes fuel management, research modelling, risk management, partnership grants for local governments and community-based bushfire management (CBBM).⁶³ CBBM is a community development approach which focuses on building on local assets and strengths and fostering trusting relationships to reduce bushfire risk.⁶⁴ There are currently 21 CBBM communities across Victoria.⁶⁵</p>

56 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 5; Sweet 2019.

57 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 5.

58 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 4.

59 Latham 2021, 37.

60 Greening the West Steering Committee 2020, 7.

61 Melbourne Water n.d.

62 Urban Transformations Research Centre n.d.

63 Safer Together n.d.

64 Macken and Safer Together 2019.

65 Forest Fire Management Victoria 2020.

Shock	Response	Overview
Bushfire	Walkaway Exercise	<p>Area: Wyndham Vale.</p> <p>Lead: Wyndham City Council in partnership with Victoria Police, fire agencies and emergency services.</p> <p>As part of its resilience strategy, in August 2022 the Wyndham City Council led a high scale emergency preparedness exercise for Wyndham Vale residents.⁶⁶ Participating residents were alerted to a local fire risk and practiced walking 'two streets back'.⁶⁷ This built residents' capacity in understanding in how to respond to a grassfire event.⁶⁸</p>
Food security	Melton Food Systems Collective	<p>Area: City of Melton.</p> <p>Lead: Melton City Council.</p> <p>The Melton Food Systems Collective engages local stakeholders to collectively support food security in Melton. This includes efforts in both relief and prevention, by working to improve access to short-term food relief, as well as address systemic barriers to food security.⁶⁹</p>
Climate change	Action for Climate Change Transformation in the West Group (ACT-WEST)	<p>Area: WPHU local government areas, including Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton and Wyndham.</p> <p>Lead: WPHU.</p> <p>WPHU established an action group for each priority area in WPHU's Population Health and Catchment Plan. One priority area is 'climate change and health', for which it established the ACT-WEST Group.</p> <p>ACT-WEST comprises nineteen stakeholders from across fifteen organisations with an aim to strengthen sector capability and community resilience; and promote healthy, sustainable food systems in the context of climate change.⁷⁰</p>
	A Local Approach to Climate Resilience (ALACR)	<p>Area: Western Melbourne.</p> <p>Lead: Network West.</p> <p>ALACR supported neighbourhood houses in Melbourne's west to strengthen community resilience to climate change impacts, from 2022-2024.⁷¹ The initiative included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops on the role of neighbourhood houses and community centres in climate change resilience.⁷² • Lunch & Learn sessions on various climate change topics.⁷³ • The Flourish Project: a partnership with community centres in Wyndham specifically; included four activities to build practical knowledge and community connections on climate resilience.⁷⁴

66 Wyndham City Council 2024, 34–35.

67 Wyndham City Council 2024, 34.

68 Wyndham City Council 2024, 34.

69 Melton City Council n.d, 4–5.

70 Western Public Health Unit 2024, 29–30.

71 Network West 2025.

72 Network West 2025.

73 Network West 2025.

74 Wyndham Park Community Centre 2024.

Shock	Response	Overview
Climate change Climate change	Climate change adaptation training and peer learning workshops	<p>Area: Brimbank and Dandenong.</p> <p>Lead: Jesuit Social Services in partnership with VCOSS and Climate Change Exchange.</p> <p>Training and peer learning workshops across 2019-20 brought councils and community sector organisations together to share organisational responses to compounding climate change impacts, and co-design new responses.⁷⁵ This was with an intention to build community resilience and adaptive capacity.⁷⁶</p>
	Business Support Program	<p>Area: Brimbank; Hobsons Bay; Maribyrnong; Melton; Wyndham; Moonee Valley; Moorabool.</p> <p>Lead: Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action (collective of above councils).</p> <p>The Business Support Program offers free advice and assistance to businesses on lowering energy use and costs, boosting productivity and cutting carbon emissions.⁷⁷</p>
	Lead the Way	<p>Area: Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay.</p> <p>Lead: Network West.</p> <p>Lead the Way was a community leadership project funded by the West Gate Neighbourhood Fund from 2022-23.⁷⁸ The project had an emphasis on amplifying the voice and capability of emerging community leaders from diverse communities, with an aim to build community resilience, connectedness and inclusivity.⁷⁹</p> <p>It included broader learning programs for 169 community leaders which provided them opportunities to build local networks, as well as a Community Connectors program for 22 community members who were able to apply for seed funding for small projects and present this at a Community Leadership Summit in June 2023.⁸⁰</p>
	Maribyrnong Community Leaders Network	<p>Area: Maribyrnong.</p> <p>Lead: Maribyrnong City Council.</p> <p>The Maribyrnong Community Leaders Network is comprised of approximately 70 graduates from Maribyrnong City Council's community leadership programs and other community leadership programs including the Lead the Way project and the African-Australian Young Women's Leadership Program.⁸¹</p>

75 Rubenstein et al. 2020, 4.

76 Rubenstein et al. 2020, 4.

77 Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action n.d.

78 Victoria State Government 2024

79 Hot House Community Projects and Network West 2023, 4.

80 Hot House Community Projects and Network West 2023.

81 Maribyrnong City Council n.d.a.

3.2 Key themes in resilience practice

The literature revealed a set of recurring themes in the design, implementation, and outcomes of resilience responses across Melbourne's west. Although many initiatives emerged in the context of acute shocks and therefore did not always meet the full definition of place-based approaches,⁸² most incorporated core place-based principles. These included shared decision-making, co-design with communities, and accountability structures that centre local knowledge and lived experience. Collectively, these themes underscore the importance of meaningful community engagement and locally grounded governance in building climate-just resilience.

The key themes identified include:

- **Community-led approaches**
Resilience efforts were strongest when shaped by community priorities, local knowledge, and culturally grounded practices. Community-led design enhanced relevance, trust, and uptake.
- **Social capital as a foundational asset**
Existing relationships, networks, and trust were critical enablers of rapid mobilisation and effective communication during crises. Social capital consistently emerged as a prerequisite for resilience.
- **Community-centred collaboration and leadership**
Neighbourhood groups, informal networks, and community organisations played central roles in coordinating support, sharing information, and sustaining engagement over time.
- **Cross-sector collaboration and systems integration**
Effective responses relied on partnerships across local government, health services, community organisations, and emergency management agencies. These collaborations enabled resource-sharing, reduced duplication, and strengthened collective capacity.
- **Place responsive flexibility**
Organisations that adapted programs, service models, and communication strategies to local contexts were better able to meet diverse community needs, particularly during rapidly evolving crises.
- **Community hubs as local resilience infrastructure**
Accessible, trusted spaces that anchor community resilience and coordination.
- **Central role of volunteers**
Volunteers were essential to outreach, service delivery, and community connection. Their contributions expanded organisational capacity and strengthened community cohesion.
- **Structural barriers and systems change**
Resilience was shaped not only by individual programs but by the broader systems in which they operate (e.g., policy settings, funding structures, governance arrangements, and organisational culture). System-level enablers were critical to sustaining long-term resilience.

The following section provides an overview and analysis of the key themes identified.

82 Alderton et al. 2022, 18.

Community-led approaches

A significant proportion of the reviewed responses reflected community-centred and community-led approaches, rather than top-down or institution-driven models. This orientation was evident both in the design of interventions and in the delivery of programs that intentionally built on existing community strengths, relationships, and knowledge systems. Such approaches align with climate justice principles, which emphasise that resilience is most effective and equitable when communities most affected by climate impacts shape the priorities, governance, and implementation of responses. Community-centred planning and action therefore emerged as a defining feature of resilience practice in Melbourne's west.

Several initiatives were developed directly in response to community-identified priorities. GenWest's *Flood Insurance Guide*, for example, was created after committees and community members identified insurance barriers as a major obstacle to recovery and a significant contributor to ongoing trauma.⁸³ Both the *Greening the West Initiative* and the *Melton Food Systems Collective* originated from community consensus processes - the former through a large-scale stakeholder think tank, and the latter through the 2023 Melton Health Promotion Forum.⁸⁴ Similarly, the second phase of *Hotspots Brimbank* expanded cross-sector collaboration in direct response to needs articulated by community members during phase one.⁸⁵

Other interventions sought to amplify and consolidate existing community action, recognising that resilience is cumulative and grounded in long-standing local organising, social networks, and place-based knowledge. *ACT-WEST* was established to bring together stakeholders in Melbourne's west who were already engaged in climate-related initiatives, creating a coordinated platform for collective action.⁸⁶ The *ALACR* project supported neighbourhood houses to strengthen and extend strategies they were already using in climate resilience work.⁸⁷ Of the 260 community-led projects supported by the *West Gate Neighbourhood Fund*, more than 140 were pre-existing initiatives, demonstrating the depth of community-driven resilience already underway in the region.⁸⁸ This principle is explicitly embedded in the *Lead the Way* program, which identifies "Generative: identifying and building on existing community strengths and activities" as a core value.⁸⁹

Together, these examples illustrate that resilience in Melbourne's west is not solely produced through formal plans or institutional interventions. It is co-created through community leadership, existing social infrastructure, and the mobilisation of local strengths, reflecting a climate-justice approach that centres community agency, lived experience, and place-based knowledge in resilience building.

83 GenWest 2025, 5.

84 Greening the West Steering Committee 2020, 10; Melton City Council n.d, 3.

85 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 5.

86 Western Public Health Unit 2024, 29.

87 Network West 2025.

88 Victoria State Government 2025.

89 Hot House Community Projects and Network West 2023, 5.

Social capital as a foundational asset

Social capital emerged as a central determinant of resilience across the reviewed literature, underpinning both rapid disaster responses and longer-term resilience-building initiatives. Consistent with resilience and climate justice scholarship, social capital enables communities to shift from vulnerability toward capability by drawing on trusted relationships, shared knowledge, and collective action. In Melbourne’s west, agencies’ existing networks with community members, local organisations, cultural groups, and local businesses were critical enablers of collaboration both within communities and across sectors.

In acute crises, social capital provided community organisations with the agility needed to respond effectively in the absence of time, tailored programs, or formalised emergency structures.⁹⁰ cohealth’s longstanding relationships with social housing residents, for example, enabled the organisation to establish a COVID-19 testing clinic for high-rise public housing residents in the City of Melbourne with only hours’ notice during the July 2020 lockdown.⁹¹ Pre-existing relationships were particularly vital for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, who often face additional barriers to accessing mainstream emergency information.⁹² Following the Maribyrnong flood, networked information-sharing and community-led care became essential in the absence of culturally informed public messaging.⁹³

Social capital also formed the foundation for recovery initiatives. In the *HRAR* program, community health organisations’ ability to build on existing community connections was identified

as a key factor in its success.⁹⁴ For cohealth, this was strengthened by the fact that many of its existing clients already lived in the targeted accommodation.⁹⁵ cohealth’s trusted presence within these estates also led to its commissioning to deliver the third *Hotspots* pilot in the City of Melbourne, enabling direct engagement with residents through interviews and outreach.⁹⁶ Similarly, during the 2022 flood response, multicultural community organisations relied heavily on the “strong grassroots relationships” developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which provided them with a clear understanding of who required support, how to reach them, and what forms of assistance were most appropriate.⁹⁷

The recognised importance of social capital has increasingly shaped strategic planning and program design across Melbourne’s west. Wyndham City Council’s *Resilient Wyndham* identifies social capital as a core resilience target and highlights community connection as the most significant factor influencing recovery from shocks, including climate-driven disasters.⁹⁸ In cohealth’s *HRAR* program, the initial months were dedicated to building trust and relationships with property owners and managers which reinforced that social capital is not incidental but intentionally cultivated.⁹⁹

At its most substantive, social capital has served as the mechanism through which collaboration occurs, enabling both community-centred partnerships and cross-sector coordination. These collaborative dynamics, each essential to climate-just resilience, are explored in the following two themes.

90 Joffe and Atherton 2021, 2.

91 cohealth 2020c.

92 Carrasco et al. 2023.

93 GenWest 2024, 60, 63.

94 Victorian Healthcare Association 2022c, 3.

95 cohealth 2021.

96 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 4.

97 Latham 2023, 14.

98 Wyndham City Council 2021, 42, 57.

99 cohealth 2021.

Community-centred collaboration and leadership

Community-centred collaboration emerged as a defining feature of resilience practice in Melbourne's west. Across the reviewed initiatives, organisations engaged communities not only as participants but increasingly as decision-makers, co-designers, and leaders. This reflects a climate-justice approach in which those most affected by climate impacts and systemic inequities hold meaningful influence over the design, governance, and implementation of resilience responses.

Community participation embedded in design and decision-making

Many initiatives incorporated community participation from the outset. In the *Melton Food Systems Collective*, for example, ensuring Melton residents' representation in decision-making is explicitly recognised as part of Council's role.¹⁰⁰ The *West Gate Neighbourhood Fund* similarly prioritises programs and events that "enable greater participation of community members".¹⁰¹ Other interventions adopted more formal co-design processes (such as the development of the *Maribyrnong Flood Insurance Guide* and the *Health Concierge* webpage) to ensure resources were culturally relevant, accessible, and grounded in lived experience.¹⁰²

Supporting and enabling community leadership

Several resilience initiatives moved beyond participation to actively cultivate community leadership. Local governments in Melbourne's west have invested in leadership development programs, including the *Melton Health Champions*, Maribyrnong's *Community Leaders Network*, the *Lead the Way* project in Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay, and Wyndham's *Climate Futures Youth Leaders* and *Building Blocks* programs.¹⁰³ Wyndham City Council has also incorporated first-aid training for community leaders into its implementation of *Resilient Wyndham*, recognising the importance of community capability in disaster preparedness.¹⁰⁴ These programs reflect a proactive, future-oriented approach to resilience that centres community agency.

Deep collaboration through peer-led and community-embedded models

The most impactful examples of community-centred resilience involved deeper devolution of power, often through peer-led or community-embedded delivery models. Peer work has been particularly effective in initiatives tailored to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. In the original *Our Community, Our Voice* project, GenWest employed a Vietnamese community leader whose trusted relationships were critical to building community confidence and safety.¹⁰⁵ The expanded program now uses a comprehensive peer-to-peer model, incorporating bilingual and bicultural workers, partnerships with cultural groups, long-term trust-building, and a strong focus on community capacity building.¹⁰⁶

100 Melton City Council n.d., 3.

101 Victoria State Government 2025.

102 cohealth 2020b; GenWest 2025.

103 Wyndham City Council 2024, 33, 36–37.

104 Wyndham City Council 2024, 33.

105 Women's Health Services Network n.d.

106 GenWest 2024 n.d.

cohealth similarly employed public housing residents as *Health Concierges*, a strategy found to “ensure [the program’s] success”.¹⁰⁷ Their ability to communicate in language and understand cultural norms enabled more effective engagement and service delivery.¹⁰⁸ Importantly, the model operated as a two-way system: Concierges disseminated health information while also gathering feedback on barriers, needs, and information gaps.¹⁰⁹

Mutual engagement and shared advocacy

Wyndham City Council’s *Bi-cultural Workers and CALD Communities Outreach Program* exemplified mutual, community-centred collaboration. Culturally and linguistically diverse community members who led COVID-19 information dissemination were supported to take on advocacy roles, articulating what their communities needed and how best to reach them.¹¹⁰ Beyond increasing testing and vaccination uptake, this approach fostered lasting relationships and strengthened trust between community and local government. Community members reported feeling they “had a voice and a light shined on them”,¹¹¹ demonstrating the transformative potential of community-centred resilience approaches.



107 cohealth 2021.

108 cohealth 2020b.

109 cohealth 2020b.

110 Wyndham City Council 2024, 55.

111 Wyndham City Council 2024, 55.

Cross-sector collaboration and systems integration

Cross-sector collaboration was a prominent feature across the reviewed responses, with numerous examples of collective action involving community organisations, local and state government, CSHOs, and emergency management agencies. These collaborations occurred across all stages of the disaster resilience cycle, from immediate response to long-term recovery and preparedness. As trusted, community-embedded actors, CSHOs often played a convening role, helping to bridge community needs with institutional systems and emergency structures.¹¹²

Collaborative action during acute events

During the 2022 flood response, partnerships between multicultural organisations and government agencies (including the SES, Victoria Police, local councils, and LPHUs) were critical in building trust and enabling rapid, culturally informed communication.¹¹³ These partnerships facilitated swift dissemination of information through community leaders' networks and created opportunities for co-design and co-delivery of recovery initiatives. The *GenWest Flood Insurance Guide* exemplifies this approach: sections were authored by expert partner organisations such as the Australian Red Cross, cohealth, the Consumer Action Law Centre, Disaster Legal Help Victoria, Financial Counselling Victoria, and Westjustice, ensuring the resource reflected diverse expertise and community needs.¹¹⁴

Embedding collaboration as a program mechanism

In several initiatives, cross-sector collaboration was not incidental but intentionally embedded as a core program mechanism. The *Hotspots Initiative* pilots explicitly aimed to strengthen place-based, cross-sector collaboration between environmental, health, and social service organisations.¹¹⁵ The first phase of the Brimbank pilot identified a lack of cross-sector coordination, prompting a deliberate focus on strengthening these relationships in phase two.¹¹⁶ A key outcome was the formation of smaller, more agile networks among stakeholders during the CroakeyGo event, which enhanced shared learning and local coordination.¹¹⁷ The pilot's evaluation ultimately identified cross-sector information-sharing and collective learning as one of two essential components of an effective heat-vulnerability response.¹¹⁸

Recognition of collaboration in strategic resilience planning

The importance of cross-sector collaboration is increasingly reflected in regional climate resilience strategies. Wyndham City Council's *Resilient Wyndham* identifies "collaborative partnership" as a key future focus area, recognising that resilience requires coordinated action across systems.¹¹⁹ The *Greening the West* initiative similarly distinguishes itself through its multidisciplinary approach, integrating on-the-ground project delivery with high-level policy development across multiple sectors.¹²⁰

112 Manne 2025, 18.

113 Manne 2025, 18.

114 Latham 2023, 15.

115 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 4, 30–31.

116 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 5.

117 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 6.

118 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 22.

119 Wyndham City Council 2021.

120 Greening the West Steering Committee 2020, 11.

Place-responsive flexibility

Resilience practice in Melbourne’s west consistently demonstrated the importance of place-responsive flexibility - the ability of organisations to adapt programs, outreach, and service models to the specific social, cultural, and environmental contexts in which climate impacts are experienced. CSHOs recognised that climate stresses intersect with local conditions such as housing type, neighbourhood infrastructure, cultural composition, and existing social networks. As a result, effective resilience responses required approaches that could be tailored to the realities of each place rather than applied uniformly across the region.

Flexibility as a deliberate program design feature

Several initiatives embedded flexibility as a core design principle. *HRAR*’s “settings-based, catchment-level” model provided intentionally broad guidance, with the expectation that providers would tailor activities to local needs, available resources, and existing partnerships, and would adapt and innovate as required.¹²¹ The *Hotspots* evaluation similarly identified flexibility in project delivery as one of the two key components of an effective heat-vulnerability response, noting that adaptable approaches enabled more targeted, context-specific outreach.¹²²

Embedding place-responsive approaches in ongoing resilience planning

There is growing recognition that place-focused approaches must be embedded into long-term resilience planning, not only activated during crises. The *Hotspots* report recommends a “whole-of-government, place-based approach” to heat vulnerability, emphasising the need for coordinated action that reflects local conditions.¹²³ The *Our Community, Our Voice* report similarly calls for place-based interventions as part of disaster preparedness, including “place-based, disaster-specific financial literacy programs”¹²⁴ and the development of community safety plans that councils can tailor in collaboration with local communities to reflect local risks, assets, and priorities.¹²⁵

Place-responsive flexibility as a climate justice imperative

These examples highlight that resilience in Melbourne’s west is strengthened when organisations adopt flexible, place-responsive models that honour local knowledge, adapt to diverse community contexts, and recognise that climate impacts are experienced unevenly across different neighbourhoods. This approach aligns closely with climate-justice principles, which emphasise the need for locally grounded, community-centred adaptation strategies that respond to the specific vulnerabilities and strengths of each place.

121 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing 2022b, 6.

122 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 22.

123 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 28.

124 GenWest 2024, 12.

125 GenWest 2024, 13.

Community hubs as local resilience infrastructure

The literature consistently highlighted the importance of community hubs, particularly neighbourhood houses, as critical local infrastructure for disaster resilience in Melbourne's west. During periods of crisis, these hubs often become the community's first point of contact and can function as "de facto recovery hubs",¹²⁶ rapidly adapting to provide information, refuge, and material support.¹²⁷ During the 2022 flooding events, for example, neighbourhood houses distributed clothing and food, hosted social activities, coordinated volunteers, and provided space for pop-up offices where service providers, government departments, and insurance companies could meet directly with affected residents.¹²⁸

Their effectiveness stems from being hyper-local,¹²⁹ both in scale and in their deep, trusted relationships with community.¹³⁰ Neighbourhood houses in Melbourne's west are recognised as accessible,

culturally safe spaces that meet the needs of community members who may be ineligible for, or uncomfortable accessing, mainstream or traditional charity services.¹³¹ This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 lockdowns, when neighbourhood houses rapidly adapted their services and outreach. Approximately 60% of emergency relief users during this period were new to neighbourhood houses,¹³² with staff attributing this to practices of "flexibility and non-judgement".¹³³

Recent climate-related events and the pandemic have reinforced that community hubs are not only vital during acute shocks but also play a central role in long-term resilience and community building.¹³⁴ Programs such as *ALACR* and *Lead the Way* demonstrate how neighbourhood houses and similar hubs are being integrated into broader resilience strategies across Melbourne's west, reflecting their role as enduring, place-based anchors in the region's resilience ecosystem.



¹²⁶ Latham 2023, 7.

¹²⁷ Latham 2023, 7; McShane and Coffey 2022.

¹²⁸ Latham 2023, 7.

¹²⁹ Network West 2025.

¹³⁰ Joffe and Atherton 2021, 2, 8.

¹³¹ Joffe and Atherton 2021, 2, 7–8.

¹³² Joffe and Atherton 2021, 6.

¹³³ Joffe and Atherton 2021, 2.

¹³⁴ McShane and Coffey 2022.

Central role of volunteers

Volunteers played a pivotal role in resilience responses across Melbourne's west, underpinning both immediate emergency relief and longer-term resilience-building efforts. During acute events, volunteer labour was essential for meeting high and rapidly changing support needs. Longer-term initiatives, such as *Greening the West*, have similarly credited volunteer community groups and local residents as central to the initiative's success.¹³⁵ Volunteers were mobilised through neighbourhood houses,¹³⁶ and increasingly through social media platforms, which have facilitated the rise of spontaneous volunteers as an emergent trend in contemporary disaster response.¹³⁷

The contribution of volunteers extended well beyond the provision of material aid or additional workforce capacity. The *Our Community, Our Voice* report highlights the relational and emotional dimensions of volunteer involvement, as described by Maribyrnong residents affected by the 2022 flood. Volunteers were valued for their expressions

of care, their ability to validate residents' experiences, and their role in lifting community morale.¹³⁸ Their presence also fostered a sense of belonging and solidarity that crossed cultural lines - an outcome closely aligned with climate justice principles that emphasise social cohesion, dignity, and equitable support.

Recognition of the critical role volunteers play in community resilience has been formalised in local policy. Maribyrnong City Council's *People and Participation Strategy 2021–2026* explicitly acknowledges volunteers as key contributors to community wellbeing and resilience.¹³⁹ This strategic emphasis reflects a broader understanding that volunteers are not simply an auxiliary workforce but a core component of the region's social infrastructure, strengthening community connection, enabling culturally responsive support, and enhancing the collective capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related events.



135 *Greening the West Steering Committee 2020*, 11.

136 *Joffe and Atherton 2021*, 11–12.

137 *GenWest 2024*, 64.

138 *GenWest 2024*, 63–64.

139 *Maribyrnong City Council 2021*.

Structural barriers and systems change

Across the reviewed literature, systems were consistently identified as both barriers to resilience and critical sites for intervention. Many accounts highlighted how lived experiences of climate impacts intersect with social service, housing, health, and emergency management systems - often compounding vulnerability. The *Hotspots* evaluation, for example, identified three systemic drivers of heat vulnerability: poor-quality social housing; pre-existing health issues requiring specialised support; and individuals' sense of disempowerment within systems such as housing services.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, the *Our Community, Our Voice* report identified system navigation as a key challenge during the Maribyrnong flood response, noting that local services need to strengthen residents' ability to understand and access a complex and fragmented service system.¹⁴¹

Recognising these systemic barriers, several initiatives in Melbourne's west have prioritised systems-change approaches as essential to

long-term resilience and climate justice. Both the *Melton Food Systems Collective* and the WPHU's *Population Health Catchment Plan* implementation emphasise systems and equity as foundational to their long-term resilience and prevention goals.¹⁴² The *Lead the Way* project similarly adopted an ecosystem-based theory of change, focusing on the interconnected system of agencies operating across City of Maribyrnong and City of Hobsons Bay. The project supported participants to understand the systems they interact with, and to build capability in navigating, influencing, and advocating within them.¹⁴³

Together, these examples illustrate that resilience in Melbourne's west is shaped not only by community capacity or organisational practice, but by the structures, policies, and institutional arrangements that determine how support is accessed, how risks are distributed, and whose needs are prioritised. Addressing systemic barriers and strengthening communities' ability to navigate and influence systems is therefore central to building equitable, climate-just resilience across the region.

¹⁴⁰ Bosomworth et al. 2020, 29.

¹⁴¹ GenWest 2024, 66.

¹⁴² Melton City Council n.d, 4; Western Public Health Unit 2024, 17.

¹⁴³ Hot House Community Projects and Network West 2023, 7; Network West 2025.

3.3 Challenges identified in resilience practice

The review identified several challenges and structural limitations that constrain the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of climate and community resilience efforts across Melbourne’s west. These challenges do not reflect shortcomings within communities. Instead, they arise from broader structural and systemic conditions – including inequitable information systems, chronic under-resourcing, fragmented institutional arrangements and the cumulative pressure of repeated shocks and stressors.

CSHOs in Melbourne’s west frequently stepped in to mitigate these systemic challenges, drawing on deep community trust, social capital, and place-based knowledge. However, their ability to do so was limited by the very structural constraints they were attempting to navigate. The following subsections outline the key challenges identified in the review: inequitable access to information, chronic under-resourcing, and the time- and relationship-intensive nature of building collaboration in fragmented systems. Together, these findings highlight opportunities for systemic reform and sustained investment to strengthen climate-just resilience across the region.

Inequitable access to information and risk communication

Challenges in community knowledge and risk awareness were a major barrier to effective climate resilience, but these challenges reflect failures in public systems, not deficits within communities. During the Maribyrnong flood, inadequate warning systems (often inconsistent, lacking urgency, or delivered too late) combined with limited public education about the floodplain to hinder community response.¹⁴⁴ These systemic shortcomings disproportionately affected CALD communities, who faced additional linguistic and informational barriers due to insufficient multilingual communication infrastructure.¹⁴⁵

Similar issues emerged in the *Hotspots* initiative, where delays in heat-health messaging and the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate resources limited early action.¹⁴⁶ Both GenWest and the *Hotspots* evaluation recommended more people-centred, tailored, and culturally responsive communication systems.¹⁴⁷

While CSHOs often filled these gaps through trusted networks and social capital, this reactive reliance underscores the need for system-level investment in equitable information systems, community leadership, and preparedness education. Melbourne Water’s review of the Maribyrnong flood recommended improved community education on flood risk and response.¹⁴⁸ Strengthening community leadership and networks between emergency events is also essential,¹⁴⁹ with the expanded *Our Community, Our Voice* program offering a promising model.

144 Articulous Communications 2023, 9; GenWest 2024, 14, 16–17.

145 GenWest 2024.

146 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 27.

147 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 28; GenWest 2024, 18, 60.

148 Articulous Communications 2023, 15.

149 GenWest 2024, 66.

Chronic under resourcing of the community sector

A consistent challenge across resilience responses was the chronic under-resourcing of the community sector. These constraints, including funding instability, limited staffing, and inadequate organisational capacity, are structural issues, not reflections of organisational inefficiency. During the COVID-19 pandemic, neighbourhood houses' agility was constrained by inconsistent funding models that rely heavily on community and local business donations.¹⁵⁰ Broader funding frameworks in Australia prioritise service delivery outputs and efficiency metrics over adaptation, social value, and resilience - limiting the sector's ability to respond to climate-related events.¹⁵¹

In the 2022 floods, CSHOs depended heavily on staff and volunteers working extended hours. Community leaders often filled cultural and linguistic gaps despite being personally affected by the floods, carrying a significant "cultural load" as interpreters and advocates.¹⁵² This reflects a structural reliance on unpaid or under-paid labour, particularly from CALD communities, to compensate for gaps in formal systems.

This combined with multiple disasters faced by Melbourne's west in the reviewed time period highlights another key barrier: the community sector's heavy reliance on volunteers during emergencies and disasters.

It is reported that 90% of not-for-profit organisations in Maribyrnong City Council rely on volunteers to operate and these organisations struggled with a decline in volunteers since the pandemic.¹⁵³

Volunteer shortages further constrained resilience efforts. Ninety percent of not-for-profit organisations in the City of Maribyrnong rely on volunteers, and many have experienced declining volunteer numbers since the pandemic.¹⁵⁴ Similar challenges were reported in the City of Melton, where reduced volunteer availability and volunteer-led revenue have constrained service delivery.¹⁵⁵

Several sources highlight opportunities for systemic reform. VCOSS recommends strategic, long-term funding; automatic surge funding at the onset of disasters; funding timelines aligned with long-term recovery; and an ongoing disaster relief and recovery workforce within the community sector.¹⁵⁶ Additional investment in preparedness and prevention could include structured collaboration between community organisations and emergency services, translation and co-design of preparedness resources, and training for multicultural community leaders.¹⁵⁷ However, preparedness funding alone does not resolve structural resourcing challenges. Many preparedness programs continue to face short-term funding cycles and reliance on voluntary labour.¹⁵⁸

150 Joffe and Atherton 2021, 9–10.

151 McShane and Coffey 2022, 2.

152 Latham 2023, 15.

153 Maribyrnong City Council 2021, 13, 18.

154 Melton City Council 2021, 13.

155 Melton City Council 2021, 13.

156 Latham 2023, 10, 12.

157 Latham 2023, 14–15.

158 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 27; Victorian Healthcare Association 2022a.

Resource intensive collaboration in fragmented systems

The time and relationship-intensive nature of community-centred resilience work reflects systemic fragmentation, not a lack of willingness or capacity within communities. The *Hotspots Brimbank* pilot struggled to engage agencies (particularly those within the broader “heat and health system”) until temperatures rose and a face-to-face community event catalysed participation.¹⁵⁹ This delay reflects broader challenges in cross-sector coordination, siloed systems, and unclear institutional mandates around climate resilience.

Similarly, the community-based bushfire management approach in the *Safer Together* program found that engagement with local agencies required time, patience, and trust-building, particularly in communities with existing divisions.¹⁶⁰ Both programs ultimately succeeded because they were structured to overcome these systemic barriers, but their experiences highlight the resource-intensive nature of building collaboration in systems where relationships and mandates are not already established.



159 Bosomworth et al. 2020, 5.

160 Monash University Accident Research Centre 2020.



4. Limitations

The 70 sources included in this review were identified through the search terms and engines described in the [Scope and Methodology](#). As a result, it is likely that some resilience responses in Melbourne’s west between 2019 and 2025 were not captured - particularly grassroots initiatives or organisational responses with limited published presence due to constrained monitoring, evaluation, or communications capacity.¹⁶¹

This reflects a broader epistemic gap in traditional research paradigms. Conventional notions of rigour privilege formal publications, institutional authorship, and well-resourced organisations. Lived experience, community voice, and the perspectives

of people facing systemic disadvantage are often under-represented or excluded from the primary literature. This creates a structural bias in what is documented, valued, and made visible in resilience research.

Recognising this limitation, the broader project intentionally seeks to centre community-sourced, informal, and lived-experience knowledge to address these epistemic gaps. While the evidence review provides an important foundation, it represents only one part of a more comprehensive approach to understanding climate resilience in Melbourne’s west.

¹⁶¹ Callis et al. 2019, 3; Wyndham City Council 2024, 8.



5. Conclusion

This evidence review demonstrates the depth, diversity, and sophistication of resilience practice across Melbourne's west in the context of multiple, overlapping crises. CSHOs have been central to these efforts - responding rapidly during emergencies and disaster while also strengthening the social foundations required for long-term resilience.

Across the reviewed literature, several consistent themes emerge. Resilience efforts in the region are strongly community-led and place-based, grounded in trusted relationships, local knowledge, and existing social infrastructure. Neighbourhood houses, volunteers, and other community hubs play pivotal roles as hyper-local connectors, service providers, and sources of stability during periods of disruption. Flexibility, place-based knowledge, and co-design with communities have enabled programs to remain responsive and effective, even under significant pressure. At the same time, the review highlights the structural and systemic conditions that shape the effectiveness and equity of resilience efforts. Chronic under-resourcing, reliance on volunteer labour, fragmented systems, and inequitable communication infrastructures all limit the capacity of CSHOs and communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related events. These challenges are not the result of community shortcomings; they reflect broader institutional arrangements and policy settings that determine how risks are distributed and whose needs are prioritised.

The review also underscores the invisibility of many grassroots and community-led initiatives, which often go undocumented due to limited evaluation capacity and structural barriers to participation in formal knowledge systems. This project seeks to address that gap by elevating community-sourced insights and drawing on engagement with health and community organisations across the region.

Importantly, many of the resilience initiatives identified in this review were made possible by

pre-existing relationships and social infrastructure, reinforcing the need for continuous investment in community engagement, leadership, and preparedness - not only during recovery, but throughout the entire resilience cycle.

Taken together, the findings point to clear opportunities to strengthen climate and community resilience in Melbourne's west through:

- **Strategic, long-term, and equitable funding models** that extend beyond emergency response.
- **Proactive investment in prevention and preparedness** including community education and leadership development.
- **Support for community-led initiatives** particularly those led by CALD communities and grassroots groups.
- **Structural support for cross-sector collaboration** reducing fragmentation and strengthening coordination.
- **Mechanisms that amplify and embed community voices** in resilience planning and decision-making.

These lessons highlight the potential for a more coordinated, equity-driven, and community-centred approach to resilience - one that recognises the expertise held within communities, addresses systemic barriers, and builds on the region's strong foundation of social infrastructure and partnerships.

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