

# Climate change – our biggest health challenge



The World Health Organization describes climate change as the greatest threat to public health in the 21st century. At the same time, tackling climate change could also be the greatest global health opportunity.

## We are already experiencing the impacts of climate change



A decrease in average rainfall



A temperature increase of just over 1°C since 1910



Increased fire danger in spring



Increased severity and frequency of bushfires



More intense storm and flooding



Increase in severe droughts

## In the future Victoria can expect:

- » The average annual temperature to increase up to 2.4°C
- » Double the number of very hot days
- » Longer fire seasons with up to 60% more very high fire danger days
- » More intense downpours
- » Decline in alpine snowfall of 35–75%
- » Rising sea levels of around 24cm

## Climate change is already affecting our health

- » More than 4000 people were hospitalised and 445 people died due to the smoke from the 2020 Black Summer bushfires.
- » Flooding has resulted in a tenfold increase in human reported cases of Ross River Virus since 1993.
- » Ambulance Victoria had a 700% rise in call outs for cardiac arrest during the 2014 heatwave.
- » Healthcare professional are already seeing climate-related physical and mental health conditions in their community such as heat stress and anxiety.
- » Exposure to bushfire smoke exacerbates heart and lung conditions including asthma and increases eye, nose and throat irritation.
- » Outdoor workers and manual labourers are at an increased risk of heat illness and heat stroke.
- » Bacteria like Salmonella thrive in the warmth, increasing our risk of food poisoning and gastrointestinal illnesses.
- » Warmer temperatures can lead to harmful algal blooms in water bodies, which threaten the safety of our drinking water and expose people to toxins.
- » Warmer temperatures can lengthen the pollen season.
- » Extreme weather can lead to psychological distress due to trauma, illness, loss of loved ones, destruction of property and displacement, and disruption of communities, goods and services.
- » Victorians feel frustration, sadness and outrage in relation to climate change. These negative emotions known as 'eco-anxiety' are felt more strongly by young people than any other population group.
- » The security and quality of our water resources are under threat which has flow on affects overall to our food production.

Victorians rank health as the issue most important to them

90%

have not thought about how climate change may affect their health.

1 in 3 Victorians

are not aware that health risks are likely to increase with climate change.

Climate change will most affect the lives and health of people who are already vulnerable in our society including:

- » People with mental illness
- » Indigenous people
- » People under 5 and people over 65
- » People living on low incomes
- » People living in poor quality housing
- » People with existing long-term health conditions

Climate change initiatives most important to Stonnington residents:



**Reducing waste**  
(92.2%)



**Sustainable transport**  
(87.1%)



**Recycling resources**  
(85.9%)