

Frequently asked questions

Climate change and health

Climate change is the most significant health challenge and opportunity of our century – and action is needed now, to ensure the future health of South Australians.

Climate change has an impact on the health of South Australians, and our health system. It affects health in many different ways and in Australia, heat causes more deaths per year than all other natural disasters combined.

What is being consulted on and who is involved?

The Department for Health and Wellbeing has collaborated with key stakeholders to develop a draft *SA Health Climate Change Framework*.

The draft Framework proposes eight (8) priority action areas and reflects some excellent work already underway within SA Health's hospitals, health services and facilities. It also recognises the significant roles the broader health sector has in climate mitigation, adaption and supporting the community.

What evidence is the draft Framework based on?

Climate change is impacting South Australia now. South Australia is becoming hotter and drier, with more severe weather events such as flooding, heatwaves, and bushfires.

The draft Framework also draws knowledge from existing work undertaken by other jurisdictions and peak bodies, adjusted to a South Australian health context.

Will climate change get worse over time?

With the changing climate there are more disasters and events occurring simultaneously and back-to-back. This means there is less time for recovery and a greater impact on physical and mental health and resilience, compared to a single event.

The term “permacrisis” reflects the possibility that our communities could remain in a state of climate crisis due to the frequency and number of these events.

Who will be most affected by climate change?

Climate change will affect everyone through worsened air quality due to increased dust and pollens, extreme weather events like fires and floods, and more frequent heatwaves.

Vulnerable people, including those with insecure housing, poverty, chronic illnesses, older South Australians and the young, will be most affected.

What risks does climate change bring?

There are significant risks to the healthcare system, including workforce shortages from those exposed to extreme weather events, damage to healthcare infrastructure and an increase in demand for healthcare due to climate change.

The health risks of climate change can be direct and indirect.

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What are some of the direct risks of climate change?

Direct impacts include injury from disasters, impacts on body systems such as exacerbations of cardiovascular disease from exposure to hot temperatures and respiratory impacts from insults such as bushfire smoke and air pollution.

What are some of the indirect risks of climate change?

Indirect impacts include increase in mosquito-borne disease and food and water insecurity due to changing ecosystems.

Are there other risks associated with climate change?

Climate change is also having serious effects on mental health and wellbeing, which can be temporary or may persist long after the triggering event.

The health industry is seeing impacts of climate change particularly on the mental wellbeing of children and young people, as well as impacts in the form of depression, anxiety and PTSD on those who have suffered through climate related extreme weather events.

How can I help to make a difference?

Resilience to the health impacts of climate change comes from shared knowledge, education, communication, and joint action with all stakeholders. Additionally, action across the system is required to substantially decrease carbon emissions from health operations and transition to Net Zero in all areas.

Your feedback will ensure that the things that matter to you are considered in the development of the final draft Framework, which will also inform development of future plans such as an overarching *SA Health Climate Change Strategy*.

All feedback will be taken into consideration and you can have your say by taking our survey, sharing comments or emailing a submission to public.health@sa.gov.au

What is the consultation timeline and next steps?

Consultation is open for four (4) weeks from Wednesday 22 May to Friday 21 June 2024.

Following consideration of all feedback, the draft Framework will be finalised and endorsed.

The final *SA Health Climate Change Framework* will guide SA Health's workforce and health services located across South Australia to adapt to the growing impacts of climate change and to reduce the contribution to climate change from the health system.

Due to the shared knowledge and action facilitated by this public consultation, once the final Framework is released later in 2024, the Framework will bring sustained improvements in population health – despite an unstable climate.

For more information

Public Health Division
Department for Health and Wellbeing
CitiCentre Building, 11 Hindmarsh Square
E: public.health@sa.gov.au
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au