

# Hot Spots: building resilience to heatwave in areas of socio-economic disadvantage

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In October 2018, the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation in Melbourne launched its Hot Spots initiative, led by not-for-profit and community health organisations, to test the resourcing of local-level, cross-sector collaborations focused on addressing heatwave vulnerability.

In 2017–2018, the Foundation consulted with Emergency Management Victoria, Victorian Council of Social Services and the Department of Health and Human Services. A gap was identified in resourcing community health and social service organisations to work collaboratively with local governments and emergency services organisations to plan for, and respond to, extreme weather and natural disasters, with a focus on those at-risk during these events.

Extreme weather events and natural disasters heighten inequalities, exacerbate poverty, increase marginalisation and risk factors (e.g. those living with mental health issues, family violence). Among the many effects of climate change, Melbourne is experiencing increased frequency and intensity of heatwaves that disproportionately affect the health of disadvantaged and marginalised community members. According to Longden (2018), 1283 people died due to heat-related illnesses between 2001 and 2015 in Melbourne.<sup>1</sup>

The Hot Spots initiative focuses on communities in Melbourne identified by the Monash Heat Vulnerability Index<sup>2</sup> as at-risk suburbs due to levels of resident disadvantage and higher temperatures during heatwaves. The foundation currently has two Hot Spots projects underway. These are led by community health organisation, IPC Health, in Brimbank and primary care partner, enliven, in Dandenong.

The Hot Spots projects have initiated cross-sector collaborations between community health and social services providers, local government and emergency services organisations. Both projects focus on identifying and reaching out to community members who are most at-risk during extreme heat events, communicating heat-health messages, increasing their capacity to respond to the information and co-designing local solutions.

The place-based projects in Brimbank and Dandenong have involved community and cross-sector engagement, the distribution of heat-health messages to targeted communities, eliciting feedback on their usefulness, identifying the capacity-building needs of relevant community-based organisations and government services, while continually strengthening the cross-sector collaboration. Evaluation has confirmed the community wants to remain involved in this work. Capacity-building needs have been identified to develop the knowledge and understanding of climate change and health across all project partners.

While the outcomes of these projects are focused on the health and wellbeing of those at-risk during heatwave events, other learnings that inform place-based community resilience work include:

- increasing collaborative effort between health and environmental organisations from both government and the community sectors responding to the human health effects of climate change
- strengthening and defining the important roles of community-based health and social service organisations in building community resilience to withstand extreme weather and disasters.

The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation will announce a third Hot Spots project in inner-Melbourne, with two further projects to be funded in 2019–2020. Hot Spots is being evaluated to test the effectiveness of supporting the community sector to lead local-level collaborations focused on the health effects of climate change and building community resilience to extreme weather and natural disasters.

<sup>1</sup> Longden T 2018, *Measuring temperature-related mortality using endogenously determined thresholds*, *Climatic Change*, vol. 150, no. 3–4, pp.343.

<sup>2</sup> Monash Heat Vulnerability Index. At: <https://sites.google.com/site/mappingvulnerabilityindex/home/related-information>.