

VicHealth submission to the Victorian Government Adaptation Action Plan consultation

Introduction

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) commends the Victorian Government for developing Adaptation Action Plans (AAPs) to build Victoria's climate resilience. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

As the state's health promotion foundation, we have a strong commitment to improving the health of all Victorians, particularly those who experience greater barriers to good health, both now and into the future. It is critical that Victoria acts to become climate-resilient and prepare for the major health and wellbeing impacts we will face.

VicHealth has made online submissions via the Engage Victoria website for the following AAPs: Health and Human Services (written submission), Primary Production (written submission), Built Environment (survey response), Education and Training (survey response) and Transport (survey response).

This submission consolidates our feedback to the first 2 AAPs, and provides further detail and context to the final 3. It begins by highlighting cross-cutting considerations that we believe should be included in all 7 AAPs, followed by specific feedback and recommendations relevant to each of the 5 AAPs. Given the significant overlap of many of the AAPs, we have repeated content over multiple sections where relevant so the feedback for each AAP can be considered in isolation.

The submission closes with an outline of VicHealth's work in this area that could provide potential opportunity for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission further, particularly on how we can collaborate to promote the health and wellbeing of Victorians in the face of climate change. Should you require any further information please contact Cassie Nicholls, Senior Policy Officer, on cnicholls@vichealth.vic.gov.au or 03 9667 1317.

Overarching feedback relevant to all AAPs

The Adaptation Action Plans (AAPs) provide a strong basis for achieving climate resilience. VicHealth provides recommendations to strengthen them below, as well as potential additional objectives and considerations for implementation.

Equity lens

VicHealth strongly endorses the Health and Human Services AAP's focus on health equity, and recommends that an equity lens is core to all AAPs and any actions taken by the Victorian Government to adapt to climate change. As noted in the Health and Human Services AAP, there is clear evidence that those currently experiencing disadvantage are at the greatest risk of negative health outcomes related to climate change. This includes people with disabilities and/or chronic health conditions, people on low incomes, people from low socioeconomic areas, rural and regional Victorians, women and girls, older people, First Nations people and people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Children and young people will bear the greatest impacts into the future, and should be prioritised using an intersectional lens.

Embedding equity principles into the AAPs will ensure the needs of these groups are central to government action.

VicHealth recommendations

- Use equity as a core principle for the AAPs and any actions taken by the Victorian Government, by addressing the health needs of groups that are experiencing or will experience the greatest health, social and economic impacts of climate change.

Social determinants of health and systems thinking

The Health and Human Services AAP recognises the role of the social determinants of health, which require action across multiple government portfolios, as the drivers of health and wellbeing often sit outside the health sector. It is important that the Victorian Government ensures delivery of all AAPs avoids siloing of action, and that non-health AAPs recognise their role in promoting health and wellbeing. We recommend that this is clearly articulated in the final Health and Human Services AAP, as well as the other AAPs (particularly Primary Production, Education and Training, Built Environment and Transport) through inclusion of specific objectives and indicators related to the social determinants of health. [Systems thinking and approaches](#) are needed to identify the relationships between climate change and the drivers of health and wellbeing.

Governance of the delivery of the AAPs should also reflect these links, beyond just immediate health impacts such as physical illness related to extreme heat or water quality.

VicHealth recommendations

- Use systems thinking to guide design of actions, recognising that the social determinants of health often sit outside of the health portfolio. This should be recognised across all AAPs, and linkages between them identified in the objectives and actions.

Health and wellbeing co-benefits across AAPs

There are clear connections and interdependencies across all 7 AAPs. All AAPs should recognise the potential health and wellbeing co-benefits of climate change action. For example, action to reduce car use or increase green spaces can improve rates of active transport and recreation, leading to

increased physical activity. Where possible, the AAPs should seek to harness these co-benefits, by considering and enhancing potential health impacts of relevant actions. Improved health and wellbeing should be a core goal of all AAPs, and all government departments and agencies should see climate change adaptation as part of their core business.

VicHealth recommendations

- Recognise the potential health and wellbeing co-benefits of actions, particularly those within the Primary Production, Education and Training, Built Environment and Transport AAPs. These should be clearly articulated within the AAPs and inform design of actions.

Community engagement

Direct engagement and consultation with the community should be central to the AAPs and their implementation, particularly for individuals within priority groups and the organisations that represent them. The Victorian Government should prioritise community engagement, use codesign principles and support locally-led delivery of initiatives. Community organisations will need to be adequately resourced to lead engagement processes.

VicHealth recommendations

- Embed community engagement into the AAPs, including direct consultation mechanisms, codesign principles and locally-led delivery of initiatives, with adequate resourcing to organisations leading engagement. Engagement should occur throughout the design and delivery of initiatives, and prioritise those that currently or will experience the greatest impacts of climate change.

Self-determination for First Nations communities

The AAP notes the importance of self-determination for First Nations communities, and the threat posed by climate change to Country and the cultural determinants of Aboriginal health and wellbeing. VicHealth strongly supports its inclusion in the AAPs.

VicHealth recommendations

- Retain the focus on First Nations self-determination within the final AAPs.

Cumulative impacts

VicHealth also strongly recommends that all AAPs take into account the fact that Victoria will face multiple climate change events and impacts at the same time. For example, extreme weather conditions will result in events that lead to disruptions to the food supply, alongside impacts on housing infrastructure, access to energy, access to safe water, direct health impacts (e.g. heat exhaustion, psychological distress etc.), barriers to employment and public transport disruptions, to name just a few. This will occur alongside other climate-related events, and potentially other health emergencies such as COVID-19 or similar health-related pandemics/events. Government agencies and services – such as the Department of Health, emergency services and local governments – may need to urgently shift their resources to respond to events, meaning that ‘business as usual’ activities to promote and protect health become under-resourced, leading to negative health outcomes for Victorians.

Therefore, all AAPs must recognise the significance of cumulative impacts, and ensure actions are not considered in isolation of one another or of the usual business of government. These events

should also be considered as ongoing certainties, not one-off ‘emergencies’, and be planned for and resourced as such.

VicHealth recommendations

- Ensure planning and resourcing takes into account the certainty of cumulative impacts from climate change, both within individual climate-related events and across multiple events/impacts.

Feedback relevant to the Health and Human Services AAP

Integrated action

As noted above, systems thinking and approaches will be necessary to ensure actions address the social determinants of health. Actions to adapt to climate change should be integrated in existing or new government actions to promote health and wellbeing, rather than being seen as an ‘add on’. For example, guidance provided to local governments to develop and deliver Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans should incorporate actions to adapt to climate change across all areas, rather than separate guidance specific to climate change impacts.

VicHealth recommendations

- Ensure adaptation actions are integrated into existing or new government actions to promote health and wellbeing.

Mental wellbeing

Climate change adversely affects mental health, causing and/or exacerbating stress, anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses.¹ Existential fear of long-lasting changes to the climate can lead to psychological distress and anxiety about the future, with people feeling a sense of loss, helplessness, anger or pessimism.²

The promotion of mental health and wellbeing and the primary prevention of mental health conditions should be further highlighted within the AAP. This should look beyond the provision of mental health support following climate-related events, and aim to build socially connected and resilient individuals and communities.

Community action to support local residents’ mental health in the face of climate-related weather events and the like is a critical part of any response, but this needs to be adequately supported by the Victorian Government, either financially or through the provision of guidance for action.

Children and young people

Children and young people should be prioritised in mental health promotion and prevention action related to climate change. Research around the mental health impacts of climate change on children and young people has found they are susceptible to developing a range of issues, such as anxiety,

¹ Hunter, D, Frumkin, H & Jha, A 2017, ‘Preventive medicine for the planet and its peoples’, *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 376, pp. 1605–1607.

² Australian Psychological Society 2020, ‘Climate change and health’, viewed 1 June 2020, <https://www.psychology.org.au/About-Us/What-we-do/advocacy/Advocacy-social-issues/Environment-climate-change-psychology/Resources-for-Psychologists-and-others-advocating/Climate-change-and-health>

depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disorders, cognitive and learning problems, adjustment problems, substance abuse, increased aggression and violence and suicide.³

Their mental health may be impacted more than adults because they have less control over actions to respond to social issues like climate change, and they may find it more difficult to deal with negative emotions. Giving children and young people meaningful opportunities to communicate and act on their concerns about climate change can increase their feelings of hopefulness, self-efficacy and resilience,⁴ and prepare them to make key decisions around the inevitable changes that they will face in the future.⁵ Communities will also benefit from hearing their perspectives and their creative responses to climate change.⁶

To further understand these issues, VicHealth recommends that under action H2, the Victorian Government either funds or leverages other organisations' investment into research around climate anxiety and the mental health impacts on children and young people.

Building on existing infrastructure and planning

Existing and new infrastructure and planning resulting from the recent Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System should incorporate climate change adaptation strategies in a holistic manner. For example, the new *Statewide Plan for the Promotion of Good Mental Health and Wellbeing and the Prevention of Mental Illness* (the development of which was recommended by the Royal Commission) should incorporate action to prevent and adapt to the mental health impacts of climate change, and seek to address the social determinants of health that are relevant to climate change.

Similarly, the AAP and related governance structures should clearly link to the Statewide Plan and other mental health governance mechanisms. The Community Collectives that were recommended by the Royal Commission present a clear opportunity for the Victorian Government to leverage existing resourcing and infrastructure to design and deliver place-based approaches, as well as directly engage with communities around their climate-related needs. There are clear links between this initiative and action H12 within the AAP.

Links to other AAPs

As noted in our response to the Built Environment AAP consultation, other AAPs should also acknowledge the potential mental health and wellbeing co-benefits of their actions. For example, research has found that spending time in green spaces is associated with positive self-reported health and subjective wellbeing.⁷ We recommend that this is recognised within the Built Environment AAP, and linkages identified within the Health and Human Services AAP.

³ Burke, S, Sanson, A & Van Hoorn, J 2018, 'The psychological effects of climate change on children', *Current Psychiatry Reports*, vol. 20, pp. 35–42.

⁴ Sanson, AV, Van Hoorn, J & Burke, SEL 2019, 'Responding to the impacts of the climate crisis on children and youth', *Child Development Perspectives*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 201–207.

⁵ Hart, R, Fisher, S & Kimiagar, B 2014, 'Beyond projects: Involving children in community governance as a fundamental strategy for facing climate change', in UNICEF Office of Research 2014, *The challenges of climate change: Children on the front line. Innocenti Insight*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, pp. 92–97.

⁶ Hart, R, Fisher, S & Kimiagar, B 2014, 'Beyond projects: Involving children in community governance as a fundamental strategy for facing climate change', in UNICEF Office of Research 2014, *The challenges of climate change: Children on the front line. Innocenti Insight*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, pp. 92–97.

⁷ White, MP, Alcock, I, Grellier, J, Wheeler, BW, Hartig, T, Warber, SL, Bone, A, Depledge, MH & Fleming, LE 2019, 'Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing', *Scientific Reports*, vol. 9, no. 1, doi:10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3

VicHealth recommendations

- Strengthen the focus on promoting mental health and wellbeing and preventing mental health conditions, with a focus on building connected and resilient individuals and communities.
- Prioritise children and young people in these actions.
- Ensure climate change adaptation is incorporated into existing and new statewide planning and delivery mechanisms, such as the new *Statewide Plan for the Promotion of Good Mental Health and Wellbeing and the Prevention of Mental Illness*.
- Leverage existing and new investment and infrastructure to design and deliver actions, such as the new Community Collectives.
- Conduct or leverage research into mental health impacts of climate change, such as climate anxiety, with a particular focus on children, young people and those experiencing disadvantage.
- Recognise the potential mental health and wellbeing co-benefits of actions contained within other AAPs, particularly in regard to the built environment.

Food systems and food insecurity

Food systems and food security are key considerations in climate change adaptation, and coordinated action is needed to build an economically and environmentally sustainable system that leads to positive health outcomes and prioritises disadvantaged groups. The draft AAP recognises the impacts of climate change on the food system and food security, and notes that many actions sit within the remit of the Primary Production AAP.

As noted in our submission to the Primary Production AAP, VicHealth recommends that this is strengthened by incorporating the actions below. Several of these are directly relevant to the work of the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. It is important that these are incorporated into the Health and Human Services and/or Primary Production AAPs. They are as follows:

- Establish a whole-of-government committee that oversees the development and implementation of a Victorian Healthy and Sustainable Food System Action Agenda (and Investment Plan), which recognises and addresses the impacts of climate change on the food system.
- Develop a whole-of-government policy that requires healthy and sustainable food procurement, prioritising local and regional food options. This will require building capacity of short supply chains to ensure procurement can be done effectively and sustainably.
- Develop a long-term approach to food relief and improved food security – one that recognises and values dignity, access to nutritious food and the pathways out of food insecurity.
- Amend the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* to require councils to specify measures to promote equitable access to a healthy, sustainable diet through a locally developed Healthy and Sustainable Food System Strategy.
- Adopt a set of indicators for monitoring the natural, economic, social and human health impacts of Victoria's food systems, in line with international examples.
- Support to producers and retailers to improve infrastructure and adopt efficient practices and technologies to reduce food loss caused by inadequate storage, transport conditions and lack of infrastructure.

Incorporation and delivery of these actions would support VicHealth's work to promote healthy eating, both including and beyond addressing climate change impacts.

VicHealth recommendations

- Ensure the Health and Human Services and/or the Primary Production AAPs include actions to strengthen food systems and food security, as noted above.

Active transport and recreation

Active transport and recreation are critical to ensuring Victorians' levels of physical activity are sufficient, and can also support improved mental health and wellbeing by creating connected communities. The draft AAP notes that the Department of Health works collaboratively with the Department of Transport on a number of active transport initiatives. VicHealth supports the inclusion of active transport in the Transport AAP, but the actions largely focus on potential disruptions to active transport rather than improving active transport options as a method of reducing car use. It also does not adequately recognise the health co-benefits of creating a transport system and built environment that promotes active transport.

The Health and Human Services AAP does note the health co-benefits, but this must be linked within the Transport AAP with clear actions to improve active transport options.

Similarly, green space is identified under action H8 as a way of managing extreme heat and rainfall events, but the health co-benefits related to active recreation are not identified. As noted above, there are also clear mental wellbeing co-benefits related to access to green spaces.⁸ VicHealth recommends that this is included in both the Health and Human Services and Built Environment AAPs.

There is evidence of the health benefits of 20-minute neighbourhoods, which are 'all about 'living locally' – giving people the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a 20-minute return walk from home, with access to safe cycling and local transport options'.⁹ VicHealth has recommended that action to support 20-minute neighbourhoods is included in the Built Environment and Transport AAPs, and recommends that it is also identified within the Health and Human Services AAP.

VicHealth also supports the recommendations contained in Victoria Walks' submissions to the Built Environment and Transport AAP consultations, and recommends that the Victorian Government refers to those submissions for further detail on promoting active travel and related health co-benefits.

VicHealth recommendations

- Identify the health co-benefits of action to increase active transport and active recreation within the Health and Human Services, Built Environment and Transport AAPs.
- Within those AAPs, include actions to improve active transport infrastructure and options, accessible green spaces and urban design, with a focus on 20-minute neighbourhoods. This should include implementation of the recommendations contained in Victoria Walks' submissions to the Built Environment and Transport AAP consultations.

⁸ White, MP, Alcock, I, Grellier, J, Wheeler, BW, Hartig, T, Warber, SL, Bone, A, Depledge, MH & Fleming, LE 2019, 'Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing', *Scientific Reports*, vol. 9, no. 1, doi:10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3

⁹ Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2021, '20-minute neighbourhoods', viewed 4 August 2021, <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/planning-for-melbourne/plan-melbourne/20-minute-neighbourhoods>

Transition communities

Communities such as those within the Latrobe Valley have a significant reliance on fossil fuels as a source of employment and economic support. During the shift to renewable energies, these communities are and will be economically and socially impacted. It is important that the AAPs recognise the health impacts of this transition.

This includes identifying actions to support the mental health and wellbeing of communities within the Health and Human Services AAP, as well as improving employment pathways under the Education and Training AAP. The Health and Human Services AAP should recognise employment and education training as social determinants of health for these communities, and note the linkages between the actions within each AAP.

Community engagement will be critical to ensuring the success of any actions.

VicHealth recommendations

- Include specific actions to promote the mental health and wellbeing of communities that are transitioning from coal-based economies.
- Develop or use existing engagement mechanisms to design and deliver place-based mental health promotion and education and training initiatives.
- Identify the linkages between education and training and the health outcomes of transition communities.

Local government

VicHealth strongly supports the inclusion of local government as a cross-cutting stakeholder. We recommend that this inclusion is retained, and that they are seen as a key partner for initiatives that have health co-benefits.

VicHealth is partnering with 16 local governments to deliver a major initiative focused on creating communities where children and young people grow up active, socially connected and healthy, as detailed on page 16 of this submission. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the initiative with the Victorian Government, as it could present potential opportunities for supporting climate change adaptation initiatives.

VicHealth recommendations

- Retain the inclusion of local governments as cross-cutting stakeholders.

Housing

VicHealth supports the inclusion of actions related to housing infrastructure, and notes the importance of secure and safe housing as a social determinant of health. As noted in our submission related to the Built Environment AAP, it is important that housing actions are considered in the context of potential health co-benefits. This includes planning considerations regarding location, green spaces, active transport and recreation, 20-minute neighbourhoods and public transport.

VicHealth recommendations

- Ensure actions to create climate-resilient housing take into consideration potential health co-benefits.

Research and monitoring

VicHealth supports the inclusion of action to expand existing surveillance to monitor climate-related health risk changes, vulnerabilities and health outcomes and to provide additional information to guide government and community responses (action H2). We recommend that as well as direct health impacts, this includes impacts to the social determinants of health (e.g. employment, education, housing etc.) and key risk and protective factors (e.g. active transport, food security, social connection etc.) that are impacted by or can mitigate the impacts of climate change.

VicHealth also recommends that the Victorian Government considers integrated measurement of wellbeing across major wellbeing domains (e.g. health, social, economic, environmental/planetary health domains), given their close links to climate-related health impacts. VicHealth and The George Institute for Global Health recently published [Integrating wellbeing into the business of government: The feasibility of innovative legal and policy measures to achieve sustainable development in Australia](#). This report outlines innovative approaches to translate sustainable development into national, state and local laws and/or policies, with the aim of inspiring practical action to improve the wellbeing of current and future generations of Australians. We recommend that the Victorian Government considers implementing such an approach across government, as it will both improve wellbeing and measure the implications of climate change.

As noted in our response above, we also recommend that under action H2, the Victorian Government seeks to further understand the specific impacts of climate change on the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and those experiencing disadvantage.

VicHealth recommendations

- Include measures related to the social determinants of health in new and existing monitoring and surveillance mechanisms.
- Consider implementation of a wellbeing approach into government decision-making and monitoring.
- Conduct or leverage research into mental health impacts of climate change, such as climate anxiety, with a particular focus on children, young people and those experiencing disadvantage.

Sector capability and capacity

VicHealth supports the inclusion of actions to build the capacity of organisations to adapt to climate change and respond to climate-related risks. We urge the Victorian Government to support this through adequate capacity building and resourcing for local governments, community organisations and peak bodies (e.g. the Victorian Council of Social Service) and non-health professionals. This should include capacity building related to direct engagement with communities, both before, during and after climate extremes.

VicHealth recommendations

- Provide adequate capacity building and resourcing for local governments, community organisations and peak bodies, and non-health professionals.
- Provide capacity building related to direct engagement with communities, both before, during and after climate extremes.

Feedback relevant to the Education and Training AAP

Early childhood development, education and training build knowledge and resilience throughout the lifespan and are an integral part in engaging the wider community in understanding and acting on the impacts of climate change. As we shift towards a net-zero carbon economy, the learnings and skills our communities need will change. We need an education and training sector that shifts with those changing needs of the community and climate.

VicHealth believes the Education and Training AAP's objectives support this goal, as they focus on skills and employment transitions and ensuring that current health, wellbeing and inclusion programs are delivered in an environmentally sustainable way.

Workplace mental health and health promotion initiatives

To strengthen this and harness potential health co-benefits, we recommend that there is an increased focus on supporting workplace mental health promotion activities. These can create resilient and connected individuals and communities, who are better equipped during climate extremes and other climate-related health risks.

VicHealth recommendations

- Include an increased focus on supporting workplace mental health and health promotion activities, with the aim of creating resilient and connected individuals and communities.

School-based initiatives

VicHealth supports the focus on social and emotional wellbeing initiatives in the school setting. In addition, we recommend a strengthened focus on food literacy in school curriculum and initiatives to help students explore resilient, sustainable and culturally accessible food systems that are impacted by climate change.

VicHealth recommendations

- Include a strengthened focus on food literacy in in school curriculum and initiatives to help students explore resilient, sustainable and culturally accessible food systems that are impacted by climate change.

Employment

VicHealth supports the AAP's inclusion of actions to increase workforce skills and support Victorians during the transition to a net-zero carbon economy by 2050. We recommend that the AAP includes specific actions to reskill and provide employment pathways for communities that have a significant reliance on fossil fuels as a source of employment and economic support (e.g. the Latrobe Valley). During the shift to renewable energies, these communities are and will be economically and socially impacted. It is important that the AAPs recognise the health impacts of this transition.

As noted in our submission to the Health and Human Services AAP, this includes identifying actions to promote the mental health and wellbeing of communities. This must be supported by actions to improve employment pathways within the Education and Training AAP. Employment and education training are social determinants of health for these communities, and linkages between the actions within each AAP must be identified. It is important to note that community engagement will be critical to ensuring the success of any actions within these communities, and that Traditional Owners are prioritised in engagement processes with the goal of self-determination.

VicHealth recommendations

- Include specific actions to reskill and provide employment pathways for communities that are transitioning from coal-based economies.
- Develop or use existing engagement mechanisms to design and deliver education and training initiatives.
- Identify the linkages between education and training and the health outcomes of transition communities.

Feedback relevant to the Primary Production AAP

Primary production is fundamental to building an equitable, regenerative, prosperous and resilient food system that delivers or ensures access to nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate food for all Victorians. VicHealth believes the Primary Production AAP's objectives support this goal within the context of climate change.

Focus on food consumers vs producers

We note that currently, actions within the AAP are strongly focused on food producers. It is important that it also recognises the needs of consumers by ensuring long-term affordability and accessibility of healthy food throughout a changing climate.

VicHealth recommendations

- Ensure the AAP has a strong focus on the consumers of food, rather than food producers.

Food security

VicHealth strongly supports the inclusion of food security as a key consideration within the AAP, as well as its identification as a cross-system risk within the Health and Human Services AAP. We recommend that the AAP clearly articulates health considerations as they relate to long-term health, so that food security has a strong focus on ensuring access to nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food.

As identified in the AAP, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health will be critical partners for this work, particularly through mechanisms such as the Food Relief Taskforce.

As noted in our submission to the Health and Human Services AAP, VicHealth recommends that the focus on food security and related health outcomes are strengthened by incorporating the actions below. Several of these are directly relevant to the work of the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, while others sit within the remit of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. It is important that these are incorporated into the Health and Human Services and/or Primary Production AAPs. They are as follows:

- Establish a whole-of-government committee that oversees the development and implementation of a Victorian Healthy and Sustainable Food System Action Agenda (and Investment Plan), which recognises and addresses the impacts of climate change on the food system.
- Develop a whole-of-government policy that requires healthy and sustainable food procurement, prioritising local and regional food options. This will require building capacity of short supply chains to ensure procurement can be done effectively and sustainably.
- Develop a long-term approach to food relief and improved food security – one that recognises and values dignity, access to nutritious food and the pathways out of food insecurity.
- Amend the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* to require councils to specify measures to promote equitable access to a healthy, sustainable diet through a locally developed Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems Strategy.
- Adopt a set of indicators for monitoring the natural, economic, social and human health impacts of Victoria's food systems, in line with international examples.

- Support to producers and retailers to improve infrastructure and adopt efficient practices and technologies to reduce food loss caused by inadequate storage, transport conditions and lack of infrastructure.

VicHealth recommendations

- Strengthen the focus of health outcomes of food security, so that the promotion of good health and prevention of diet-related disease are key considerations within related actions.
- Ensure the Primary Production and/or Health and Human Services AAPs include actions to strengthen food systems and food security, as noted above.

Feedback relevant to the Built Environment AAP

VicHealth supports the objectives of the AAP, as a well-designed built environment promotes the health, safety, liveability and wellbeing of the community. The AAP recognises the importance of the built environment and how it intersects with mitigating the impacts of climate change while ensuring the overall wellbeing of the community it supports.

There is evidence of the health benefits of 20-minute neighbourhoods, which are ‘all about ‘living locally’ – giving people the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a 20-minute return walk from home, with access to safe cycling and local transport options’.¹⁰

VicHealth has recommended that action to support 20-minute neighbourhoods is included in the Health and Human Services and Transport AAPs, and recommends that it is also identified within the Built Environment AAP.

To support this and harness potential health co-benefits within the built environment, VicHealth recommends that the following actions are added to or strengthened within the AAP (and where relevant, the Transport and Health and Human Services AAPs):

- Develop consistent, evidence-informed policies and standards for dwelling density, street connectivity and access to shops, services and public open space to achieve walkable neighbourhoods for all.
- Support private landowners and developers to retain or provide green infrastructure.
- Focus on the creation of suburban centres and regions hosting more diverse employment.
- Ensure that amenities are provided to people working from home including active transport, local shops and services and open space.
- Ensure prioritisation of vulnerable groups in infrastructure/built environment initiatives, including public housing development/upgrades, provision of subsidies for renewable energy sources).

VicHealth also supports the recommendations contained in Victoria Walks’ submissions to the Built Environment and Transport AAP consultations, and recommends that the Victorian Government refers to those submissions for further detail on promoting active travel and related health co-benefits.

As noted in our response to the Health and Human Services AAP consultation, research has found that spending time in green spaces is associated with positive self-reported health and subjective wellbeing.¹¹ We recommend that this is recognised within the Built Environment AAP, and linkages identified within the Health and Human Services AAP.

¹⁰ Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2021, ‘20-minute neighbourhoods’, viewed 4 August 2021, <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/planning-for-melbourne/plan-melbourne/20-minute-neighbourhoods>

¹¹ White, MP, Alcock, I, Grellier, J, Wheeler, BW, Hartig, T, Warber, SL, Bone, A, Depledge, MH & Fleming, LE 2019, ‘Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing’, *Scientific Reports*, vol. 9, no. 1, doi:10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3

Feedback relevant to the Transport AAP

VicHealth believes the Transport AAP's objectives support general principles concerning future-proofing infrastructure that is vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

VicHealth recommends that the objectives and actions within the AAP are further strengthened to increase active transport, as both an emissions-reduction initiative and a way of promoting health and wellbeing. Active transport and recreation are critical to ensuring Victorians' levels of physical activity are sufficient, and can also support improved mental health and wellbeing by creating connected communities.

Currently, the AAP's actions focus on potential disruptions to active transport rather than improving active transport options as a method of reducing car use. It does not include specific actions to promote active transport despite identifying increases in walking, cycling or using public transport as a result of projected rising temperatures, and does not adequately recognise the health co-benefits of action.

There is evidence of the health benefits of 20-minute neighbourhoods, which are 'all about 'living locally' – giving people the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a 20-minute return walk from home, with access to safe cycling and local transport options'.¹² The actions within the Transport AAP should support the creation of 20-minute neighbourhoods, and be clearly linked to actions and outcomes within the Built Environment and Health and Human Services AAP.

VicHealth recommends that the AAP is strengthened by adding the following actions:

- Develop planning policy to allow streets to better accommodate walking, cycling and other active transport.
- Implement well-connected networks of separated bicycle lanes and reduced traffic speeds to support increased active transport.
- Implement safe, visible and efficient pedestrian crossing points, including near schools.
- Introduce end-of-trip bike facilities around transport nodes and activity centres.
- Introduce school zones that prioritise pedestrians and cyclists through well-connected and protected bike lanes.
- Implement school drop-off zones located away from schools so children can walk for part of their journey and to create safer space for children arriving by foot, bike or public transport.
- Close streets or reduce car access, introduce traffic calming measures and create low traffic neighbourhoods to reduce exposure to air pollution and noise.

It is important that community consultation is prioritised throughout implementation of actions, as noted above, particularly for those impacted by changes are directly consulted, such as Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians, young people and residents in areas where public transport routes may be altered as a result of climate change.

VicHealth also supports the recommendations contained in Victoria Walks' submissions to the Built Environment and Transport AAP consultations, and recommends that the Victorian Government refers to those submissions for further detail on promoting active travel and related health co-benefits.

¹² Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2021, '20-minute neighbourhoods', viewed 4 August 2021, <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/planning-for-melbourne/plan-melbourne/20-minute-neighbourhoods>

Relevant VicHealth initiatives and learnings

As the state's health promotion foundation, VicHealth aims to promote good health and wellbeing and prevent chronic disease. We do this by working directly with individuals, community groups, researchers and a wide range of organisations across multiple settings, to deliver evidence-based initiatives that respond to the needs of Victorian communities. We have a key focus on addressing health inequities and ensuring no child or young person is denied a future that is healthy.

There are several current VicHealth initiatives that may provide opportunities for collaboration or knowledge-sharing to support the Victorian Government's delivery of the AAPs. We would welcome further discussion with the Victorian Government on these initiatives and our broader learnings in health promotion, community engagement and research.

Victorian Local Government Partnership

VicHealth is partnering with Victorian councils to set children and young people up for their best possible future by creating communities where they can grow up active, socially connected and healthy. The partnership will amplify their voices, ideas and experiences to create a healthier future.

We know young people are eager to be a part of healthy and connected communities. By offering meaningful opportunities where their voices can be heard, we can inspire more creative local solutions for greater impact. This work will be supporting those who need it most – communities who already face greater barriers to reaching their full health.

Over the coming years, we'll work with councils in a strategic and equitable way through evidence-informed health promotion modules and communities of practice. By partnering with councils in this way we will see stronger and long-lasting outcomes for more Victorians.

Opportunities:

- There is opportunity to leverage this investment and the existing relationships with local governments to integrate planning to promote healthy, connected and resilient communities that can adapt to climate-related impacts.
- VicHealth is providing capacity building to councils around engaging with communities, which can support the Victorian Government's engagement mechanisms with local governments and community members.
- VicHealth can provide learnings from the partnership to inform government initiatives around working with local governments and community engagement.

Youth engagement

VicHealth has a long history of engaging young people in the design and delivery of health promotion initiatives. We have recently established a new partnership with 7 youth organisations, focused on building back a better, healthier and fairer Victoria for children and young people.

The 7 organisations will work alongside VicHealth to put young people at the centre of health solutions during and beyond the coronavirus pandemic – particularly in supporting young people to access healthy food, stay active and feel connected to others in their community.

The partnerships with Berry Street, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, Koorie Youth Council, Minus 18, Youth Affairs Council Victoria and Youth Disability Advocacy Service will be critical in shaping health initiatives that deliver for young Victorians.

Opportunities:

- VicHealth can provide learnings from the partnership to inform government initiatives around youth engagement.
- There is opportunity to leverage this partnership to provide direct access to the organisations that represent young people and the young people themselves.

Climate change research

VicHealth is funding a research project that will explore the evidence used in local government public health decision-making to address climate change and its impacts on health, both internationally and in Victoria.

The study involves a statewide survey with a more general analysis on how research evidence is used in decision-making. It also includes interviews specifically exploring experiences of evidence use to tackle climate change and health, with an emphasis on where evidence is sourced from and internal and external collaboration or partnerships that are helping to locate and apply the evidence base.

Opportunity:

- VicHealth can provide learnings from the research project to inform the Victorian Government's support of local governments in climate change adaptation.

Active travel

Active travel is a critical way of ensuring Victorians achieve the recommended levels of physical activity needed for health and wellbeing, particularly for children and young people. These environments require well-designed neighbourhoods, safe and amenable pathways and cycling lanes, access to public transport options, and connected communities.

VicHealth has supported significant research, practice and policy activity to promote active travel. We have worked with local governments, peak bodies and communities (particularly parents and children) to understand and address barriers to walking and cycling.

Opportunity:

- VicHealth can provide learnings from active travel research and practice to inform the Victorian Government's support of active travel initiatives under the AAPs.

Healthy eating

VicHealth's vision is to create a healthy, equitable, sustainable and resilient food system in Victoria that supports connected communities and good food for all. VicHealth has in the past played a key role in supporting healthy and sustainable food systems across Victoria.

Together with our partners, we are working to drive food systems change in Victoria for better health, social and environmental outcomes. A food system that is fair and equitable – for farmers, people throughout the food supply chain, as well as the consumer; one that is sustainable and resilient; and one that provides and prioritises nutritious and culturally appropriate food for all.

Our previous work in this area includes a focus on responding to food insecurity during the coronavirus pandemic, including a project that aims to give people facing disadvantage greater access to high-quality, affordable fruit and vegetables. Learnings from this work would be applicable to government responses to food insecurity during climate-related disruption to the food supply.

Opportunities:

- VicHealth can provide learnings from our work to strengthen the food system and prevent and respond to food insecurity.
- There is opportunity to build on partnerships with councils to develop healthy, equitable, sustainable and resilient food systems that connect members of the community with government.

Mental wellbeing

All Victorians deserve to live healthy, happy lives and experience positive mental health and wellbeing. Despite considerable evidence that many mental health conditions are preventable, too many people in our community experience mental health conditions that affect their wellbeing and their ability to participate fully in everyday life.

VicHealth is focusing on children and young people to develop initiatives that foster positive social connections. Loneliness and lack of positive social connections are emerging issues of concern internationally, as their impact on mental and physical wellbeing can be profound. Creating socially connected and resilient communities will be critical to adapting to climate change and ensuring communities can respond to and recover from climate-related events such as bushfires and floods.

Opportunities:

- VicHealth can provide learnings from our work to promote mental health and wellbeing and prevent mental health conditions, particularly in regard to social connection and young people.
- VicHealth can provide advice on developing coordinated and comprehensive frameworks for mental health promotion and prevention activity and undertaking cross-sectoral activity with partners from a wide range of settings.

Wellbeing economies

As noted previously, VicHealth and The George Institute for Global Health recently published [Integrating wellbeing into the business of government: The feasibility of innovative legal and policy measures to achieve sustainable development in Australia](#). The report outlines innovative approaches to translate sustainable development into national, state and local laws and/or policies, with the aim of inspiring practical action to improve the wellbeing of current and future generations of Australians. We recommend that the Victorian Government considers implementing such an approach across government, as it has the potential to improve health outcomes, support and measure climate change adaptation strategies, and measure the wellbeing implications of climate change.

Opportunity:

- VicHealth can share learnings from our work in this space, and engage the Victorian Government in further activity to design and integrate a wellbeing approach into the business of government.