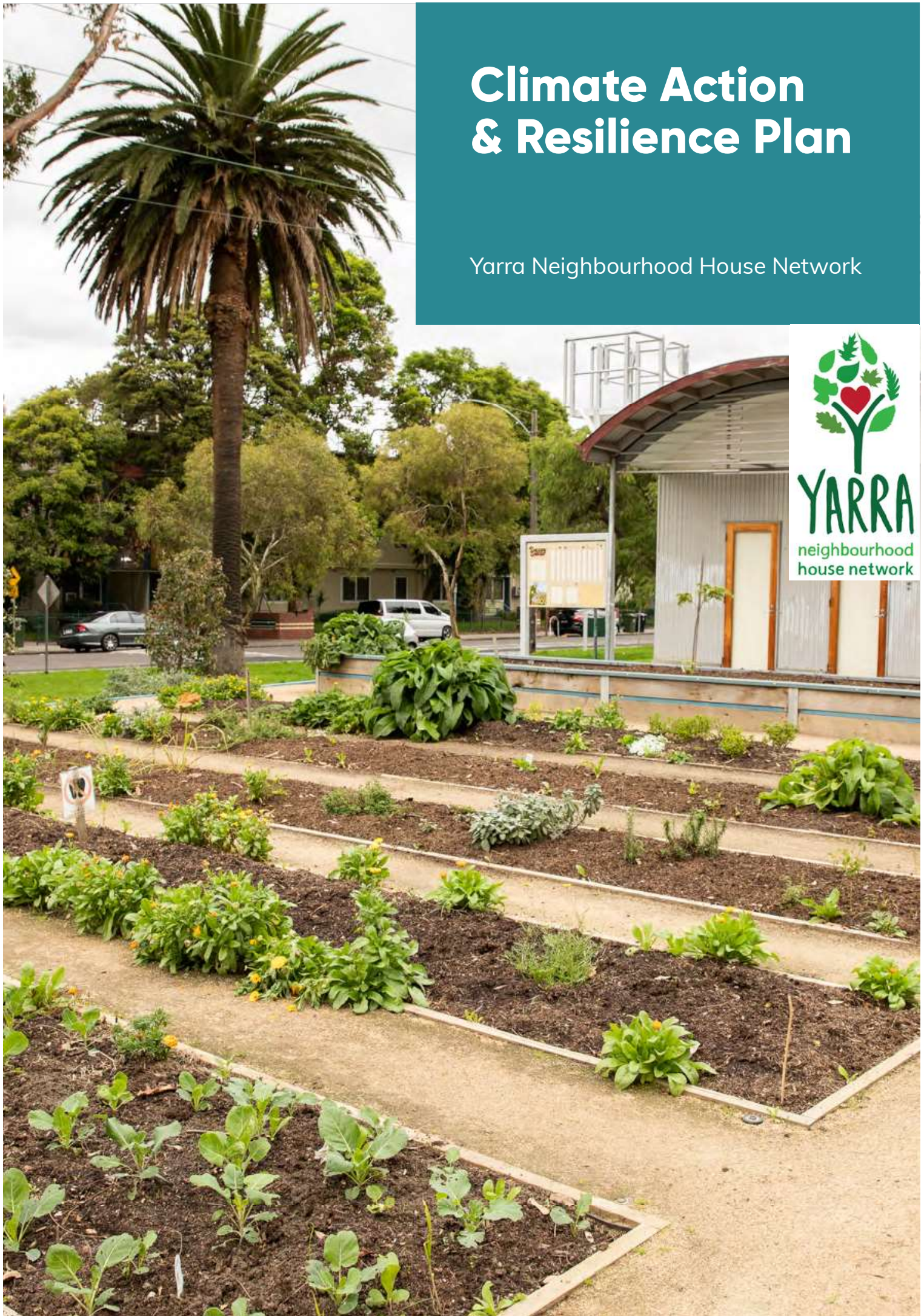


# Climate Action & Resilience Plan

Yarra Neighbourhood House Network



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Yarra Neighbourhood House Network acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and true sovereigns of the land now known as Yarra.

We acknowledge their creator spirit Bunjil, their ancestors and their Elders. We acknowledge the strength and resilience of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, who have never ceded sovereignty and retain their strong connections to family, clan and country despite the impacts of European invasion.

We also acknowledge the significant contributions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to life in Yarra.

Finally, we acknowledge that the climate crisis affects the human rights of First Nations people disproportionately, here in Australia and around the world, including rights to health, water, food, housing, self-determination and life itself. We recognise that equal and equitable access to solutions are often unavailable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities due to structural and systemic racism<sup>1</sup>.



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Ballum Ballum garden at the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre

# Introduction

In 2023, the nine neighbourhood houses in the City of Yarra worked together to consider how we could make our houses more sustainable and resilient to the impacts of climate change, and support the community to do the same. The outcome was this *Yarra Neighbourhood House Network Climate Action & Resilience Plan*.

The devastating consequences of climate change are already being experienced across Australia, with these impacts anticipated to increase in frequency and severity as global temperatures rise<sup>2</sup>. Here in Yarra, this means intensifying extreme weather events such as heatwaves, storms and floods, as well as declining rainfall, increased food and water insecurity, and economic and cultural impacts<sup>3</sup>.

While these changes affect us all, we know it affects some people more than others, often disproportionately impacting people in our community already experiencing marginalisation or disadvantage. For example, someone facing financial challenges may not be able to afford to turn on their air-conditioner, those with limited English or computer literacy may not receive or understand important weather or health warnings, and people with existing health conditions may have symptoms worsen or have access to health services impacted.

Simultaneously, these communities often have less access to climate solutions such as subsidies to buy a more energy efficient air-conditioner or leafy streets and green spaces near their home to keep cool<sup>4</sup>.

Neighbourhood houses are community-based organisations that respond to the priorities and needs of their local neighbourhoods - particularly those facing marginalisation and disadvantage - and build community

capacity through learning and social opportunities. Our core work includes the promotion of social and emotional well-being, delivery of physical wellness programs, respect and protection of the natural environment, and economic and educational inclusion. Our houses are more than just physical spaces that provide material support; our deep, diverse, and long-standing connections within and across Yarra mean they are places that inherently build community resilience. Every day, our neighbourhood houses provide support for people who, due to their circumstances and the way our city and systems are designed, are more at risk to the impacts of climate change. Simultaneously, our houses are committed to sustainability and play an active role in facilitating and embedding sustainability actions across our local communities.



Extreme heat events are occurring with greater frequency and severity

This Yarra Neighbourhood House Network Climate Action and Resilience Plan 2023 builds on work already being undertaken by Yarra's neighbourhood houses to address and respond to the impacts of climate change. In 2023, we came together with the support of the Yarra City Council and Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places to identify clear objectives based on our strengths as a network and our community's needs. This plan is our commitment to work together on these four objectives:



### 1. Sustainable Houses

We actively reduce our environmental footprint and look after our natural environment.



### 2. Resilient Houses

We work to build our resilience to extreme weather and adapt to the changing climate.



### 3. Sustainable Communities

We help our community to reduce their environmental footprint and look after the natural environment.



### 4. Resilient Communities

We help our community to build resilience, adapt to the changing climate and mitigate the impacts of extreme weather.

While the neighbourhood house network aspires to implement this plan in full, the ability to do so is dependent on resources and support from external partners and stakeholders. This is due to a number of limiting factors, including:

- The core neighbourhood house funding being required for primary operations rather than additional projects.
- The lack of sustainable ongoing activity or program funding.
- The predominantly one-off nature of existing funding opportunities.
- The cost, availability and time required for training.



# The Yarra Neighbourhood House Network

There are nine neighbourhood houses in the Yarra Neighbourhood House Network:

- Alphington Community Centre
- Belgium Avenue and Collingwood Neighbourhood Houses
- Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre
- Finbar Neighbourhood House
- Fitzroy Learning Network
- Holden Street Neighbourhood House
- North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House
- Richmond Community Learning Centre

Yarra's neighbourhood houses play a critical and trusted role in the social infrastructure of the local community. There is a focus on lifelong learning through skills development, wellbeing, and social connection, catered to diverse life stages and cultural groups. Programs cover a wide range of activities including gardening, cooking, arts and crafts, repair workshops, computer classes and language classes, as well as a variety of social supports. Through the houses, people can equitably access a range of services and support, including flexible social support, settlement processes, life skills, employment and business incubation, and health literacy and wellbeing programs.

Neighbourhood Houses work within a capability-based community development model and operate firmly within a social justice framework, responding to and addressing social inequity through hyper-local programs and services<sup>5</sup>. Our houses have in-depth local knowledge, trusting relationships and specialised community development skills. Our houses present significant value to their local community, evident before and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, it is estimated that our houses in Yarra delivered more than \$14 million of value to the community<sup>6</sup>.

As a collective, the Yarra Neighbourhood House Network is able to strengthen our capacity for action and amplify the influence of each of our individual houses. By building collective knowledge around community needs and issues and sharing skills and expertise, we are constantly innovating and growing. Through the development of this shared *Climate Action and Resilience Plan*, we are developing a mutual understanding of the impacts of climate change on our local communities and a shared commitment to embedding sustainability and resilience across our houses and communities.



Community garden at the North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House



Community garden at the Alphington Community Centre



## Objective 1 – Sustainable Houses

We actively reduce our environmental footprint and look after our ecosystem.

Our staff and volunteers are already taking action to protect the environment. We want to build on this wonderful work and make sure we have the funding, infrastructure and leadership to support further action.

| #   | Action  | Resourcing                    |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|
| 1.1 | Minimise waste going to landfill through:<br>1. Embedding waste hierarchy principles ('the 6 R's') across all programs and activities, including for third parties hiring our space, and;<br>2. Strengthen composting capability across the network through information and resource sharing. | Existing budget               |
| 1.2 | Optimise energy efficiency, investigate renewable energy options and electrify all houses (i.e. rooftop solar, draught proofing, insulation).   | Requires additional resources |
| 1.3 | Offer professional development for staff and volunteers across the network with a focus on climate change and sustainability.   | Requires additional resources |
| 1.4 | Develop an ecological and social justice procurement position or policy.  | Requires additional resources |



## Objective 2 – Resilient Houses

We work to build our resilience to extreme weather and adapt to the changing climate.

Extreme weather - like heatwaves or floods - can make it difficult to continue to provide our services. We want to be prepared so we can support our community when we're needed most, and make sure our staff and volunteers are safe.

| #   | Action   | Resourcing                    |
|-----|--|-------------------------------|
| 2.1 | Identify infrastructure upgrades to strengthen the physical resilience of all houses in the network and seek support for implementation.   | Requires additional resources |
| 2.2 | Provide training for staff and volunteers on climate change, climate justice, and the role of neighbourhood houses in adaptation and resilience building.  | Requires additional resources |
| 2.3 | Work towards increasing emergency preparedness across the houses and community, by:<br>1. Identifying climate risks to the network, service continuity and the community.<br>2. Mapping the social infrastructure that contributes to climate resilience and varied roles and capacities (i.e. opening hours of cool spaces).<br>3. Document the strengths, capabilities and barriers of neighbourhood houses to support our community through extreme weather and learn from other networks.<br>4. Refine emergency preparedness and response policies, communication and coordination as a network to ensure the safety of and better support staff, volunteers, users and the wider community during extreme weather. | Requires additional resources |





## Objective 3 – Sustainable communities

We help our community to reduce their environmental footprint and look after our ecosystem.

There are so many community members and groups helping to reduce waste and carbon emissions, protect biodiversity and create a thriving ecosystem in Yarra. We're committed to supporting these sustainability efforts to foster the change that needs to happen.

| #   | Action   | Resourcing  |
|-----|--|---|
| 3.1 | Continue to develop programs and infrastructure that support the community to reduce waste to landfill, including through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing opportunities for reusing, repairing and recycling, and;</li> <li>2. Strengthening programs and networks to collect and distribute fruit and veg that would otherwise go to waste.</li> </ol> | Existing budget/<br>Requires additional resources |
| 3.2 | Provide opportunities for the community to develop skills and knowledge around sustainable living choices and climate action (i.e. through integration into existing programs, services and curriculums such as Plastic Free July).  | Requires additional resources                     |
| 3.3 | Continue to provide access to spaces for the community to learn how to grow their own food.  | Existing budget/<br>Requires additional resources |
| 3.4 | Explore and action opportunities to contribute to the flora and fauna biodiversity within Yarra (i.e. beehives, frog bogs).  | Requires additional resources                     |



## Objective 4 – Resilient communities

We help our community build resilience to extreme weather and adapt to the changing climate.

Extreme weather impacts us all, but we know it impacts some people more than others. We're committed to helping our community to prepare for climate change, build strong connections with others, and make sure everybody is safe and well no matter what the conditions.

| #   | Action   | Resourcing  |
|-----|--|---|
| 4.1 | Continue to connect the community through events and programs to minimise social isolation and strengthen local support networks.  | Existing budget                                   |
| 4.2 | Expand access to information and resources that help our community to be more resilient to extreme weather and adapt to the changing climate.  | Requires additional resources                     |
| 4.3 | Provide opportunities for learning about climate impacts and preparedness through new and existing programs and projects (i.e. during English classes).  | Requires additional resources                     |
| 4.4 | Develop resources and programs to support at-risk community members during periods of isolation due to climate impacts (i.e. parents with young children).   | Requires additional resources                     |
| 4.5 | Support wider community engagement in governmental planning and democratic process and amplify the lived experiences of marginalised and at-risk community members to inform decision making (i.e. enrol to vote initiatives, establishing a Democracy centre, facilitate engagement in government inquiries). | Requires additional resources                     |
| 4.6 | Investigate the role of houses to be part of a network of safe spaces during extreme weather (i.e. as community cooling centres).  | Existing budget/<br>Requires additional resources |



Community garden at the North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House



Community garden at the Alphington Community Centre

## Priority actions to support all objectives

These priority actions cut across the actions in the objectives.

Our network is looking to build skills and partnerships within and beyond our neighbourhoods.

| #   | Action  | Resourcing                    |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|
| 5.1 | Include climate change and resilience as a priority in the committee of management and/or in the strategic plan of all houses across the network.                               | Existing budget               |
| 5.2 | Work towards reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and embed First Nations knowledges and perspectives into climate action and resilience planning. | Requires additional resources |
| 5.3 | Develop capacity to implement the climate actions within this plan (i.e. through volunteers and student placements).  | Requires additional resources |
| 5.4 | Improve coordination and collaboration on grant opportunities related to climate action and resilience.   | Requires additional resources |



## Advocacy priorities

The drivers of climate vulnerability are systemic and barriers exist for many to implement sustainability initiatives and build resilience.

Our network will use our collective voice, and the voices of those who access our houses, to advocate for government interventions that address the systemic issues and reduce these barriers.

| #   | Action   |
|-----|--|
| 6.1 | Advocate for greater investment in sustainability and resilience measures for public housing tower residents.  |
| 6.2 | Advocate for more accessible green and cool spaces and travel routes across the Yarra community, particularly in proximity to public housing residents and other at-risk communities.  |
| 6.3 | Advocate for network-wide investment in energy efficiency and climate appropriate infrastructure upgrades (i.e. insulation, double glazing, draught proofing).   |
| 6.4 | Ensure at-risk community members are included in and able to access sustainability incentives (i.e. solar for renters).  |
| 6.5 | Advocate for improved government communications around climate impacts and emergency preparedness that consider linguistic diversity and digital access, including considering how to leverage existing social and community networks. |
| 6.6 | Amplify the lived experiences of at-risk community members to inform planning and decision making at all levels of government.   |
| 6.7 | Advocate for engagement of the network in municipal emergency management planning to understand the strengths, requirements and role of neighbourhood houses (i.e. via scenario planning).   |
| 6.8 | Advocate for increased government welfare support payments (i.e. increase to jobseeker rate).  |
| 6.9 | Advocate for accessible and improved public transport and cycling infrastructure.  |



Community event at the Fitzroy Learning Network



## Appendix – Policy Context

The Victorian Government and Yarra City Council have several strategic plans and policies to drive climate action and community resilience. This section highlights some key priorities and actions that have helped shape the *Yarra Neighbourhood House Network Climate Action and Resilience Plan 2023*, including the *Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022–2026*, the *Greater Melbourne Regional Adaptation Strategy*, the *Yarra Climate Emergency Plan 2020-2024*, and the *City of Yarra Council Plan 2021-2025*.

### *Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022–2026*<sup>7</sup>

The *Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022–2026* seeks to put climate change adaptation at the forefront of policy decision-making across the sector. The plan highlights strategic actions to be implemented by the Health and Human Services system to address climate change.

There are three strategic action areas in this sector plan that have informed the network's *Climate Action and Resilience Plan 2022*:

- Infrastructure resilience
- Public and stakeholder engagement on climate resilience and health
- Sector capability

Neighbourhood Houses are a critical part of the health and human services infrastructure of Victoria, receiving core funding from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, which is guided by this sector adaptation action plan. Neighbourhood houses are an important piece of the puzzle to achieve

the strategic actions within this action plan. For example, supporting public engagement through the relationships they hold with diverse community groups, in particular with those who live in social housing and those who may have higher rates of engagement with health infrastructure such as people with disabilities or older people.

The sector adaptation plan's focus on "developing options to manage the impacts of urban heat" and "securing climate-resilient health infrastructure" highlights the important role of the physical and social infrastructure of neighbourhood houses during periods of extreme weather and the need to ensure facilities are fit-for-purpose<sup>7</sup>. Aligning with the sector adaptation plan to build the sector capability offers opportunities for collaboration between neighbourhood house networks and Government to effectively and equitably adapt to climate change.

### *Greater Melbourne Regional Adaptation Strategy*<sup>8</sup>

The *Greater Melbourne Regional Adaptation Strategy* is driven and owned by local communities and stakeholders, identifying strategic priorities and actions for adaptation and resilience building in Greater Melbourne. Examples of relevant key action areas include:

- Supporting climate resilient service delivery (Action Area 2)
- A focus on supporting the most at-risk communities and people (Action Area 5)

There are a number of priorities in the strategy that have informed the network's *Climate Action and Resilience Plan*. Some examples include:

- Ensure that the people most at-risk are not worse off in a changing climate. This is an opportunity to address the disadvantage and inequality that exists today.
- Deliver communications and engagement projects for at-risk groups, including identifying a network of community leaders.
- Support community service organisations to build their resilience and business continuity to minimise disruptions to service delivery. Build and/or upgrade existing community buildings, such as Community and Neighbourhood Houses, to create a network of safe resilient places where people can go in weather extremes.

### *Yarra Climate Emergency Plan 2020-2024*<sup>3</sup>

Yarra City Council was one of the first local governments in the world to declare a climate emergency, acknowledging both the scale and urgency of action needed to avoid the catastrophic impacts of global heating

The *Yarra Climate Emergency Plan 2020-2024* identifies overarching goals related to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience-building. Among others, these goals include:

- Achieve zero-net emissions across the entire Yarra community by 2030, and accelerate the removal of excess carbon emissions.
- Ensure our community is safe, healthy, and resilient — especially those most vulnerable to severe climate impacts.

Additionally, the plan identifies several objectives with significant alignment to the objectives of the networks *Climate Action and Resilience Plan*. Principal among these is an objective to:

- Support the most vulnerable in our community to prepare and cope with extreme climate impacts, including heatwaves, storms, floods, transport disruptions and power outages through:
  - Targeted communications and in-home support to older people, those who are unwell, have additional needs or are living in housing with poor environmental performance.
  - Adapting heatwave and other climate risk messages promoted to the community.
  - Build the capacity of community organisations to prepare for and respond to climate related impacts (for example, community service organisations, outreach workers, emergency response agencies, places of refuge, such as neighbourhood houses, libraries and leisure centres).

## City of Yarra Council Plan 2021-25<sup>9</sup>

The Council Plan 2021-25 is Yarra City Council's key strategic document. It informs the Council's work and decision-making and sets out what Council seeks to achieve over its four-year term. The Council Plan 2021-25 is informed by extensive engagement, including a deliberative community panel, and addresses the Yarra 2036 Community Vision.

Several strategic objectives are relevant to the objectives included in this *Climate Action & Resilience Plan*, including:

### • Strategic Objective 1: Climate and environment

- Engage and support the community to participate in climate emergency actions, including in relation to health-related impacts.

### • Strategic Objective 2: Social equity and health

- Build a more resilient, inclusive, safe and connected community, which promotes social, physical and mental wellbeing.

### • Strategic Objective 3: Local economy

- Yarra's neighbourhoods and major activity centres, nightlife and employment precincts are thriving, accessible and connected. They support and inspire diverse creative communities, cultural activities, businesses, and local employment.

### • Strategic Objective 4: Place and nature

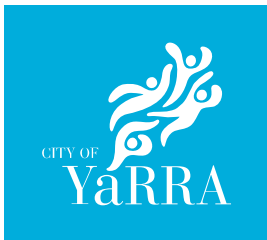
- Protect and enhance the biodiversity values, connectivity and resilience of Yarra's natural environment.
- Encourage people to connect with Yarra's natural and cultural heritage and prioritise the voices of Traditional Owners

### • Strategic Objective 5: Transport and movement

- Foster strategic partnerships and advocate to improve sustainable and active transport options, integration and accessibility.

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