

# Victorian Climate Change Green Paper



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Climate Change Submission  
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## Introduction

Women's Health Victoria is a statewide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service. We are a non government organisation with most of our funding coming from various parts of the Victorian Department of Human Services. We work with health professionals and policy makers to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women.

Our work at Women's Health Victoria is underpinned by a social model of health. We are committed to reducing inequities in health which arise from the social, economic and environmental determinants of health. These determinants are experienced differently by women and men. By incorporating a gendered approach to health promotion work that focuses on women, interventions to reduce inequality and improve health outcomes will be more effective and equitable.

Women's Health Victoria's vision is for a society that takes a proactive approach to health and wellbeing, is empowering and respectful of women and girls and takes into account the diversity of their life circumstances.

Women's Health Victoria's ways of working are guided by four principles:

- We work from a feminist framework that incorporates a rights based approach.
- We acknowledge the critical importance of an understanding of all of the determinants of health and of illness to achieving better health outcomes.
- We understand that the complexities involved in achieving better health outcomes for women require well-considered, forward thinking, multi-faceted and sustainable solutions.
- We commit to 'doing our work well'; we understand that trust and credibility result from transparent and accountable behaviours.

## **SUBMISSION**

Women's Health Victoria welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Green Paper. It is an important document that highlights the Government's commitment to improving our environment for future generations.

This response begins with an outline of the impact of climate change and climate change policies on women. This is followed by some general comments on the Green Paper and responses to specific consultation questions.

## **WOMEN AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Climate change is not gender neutral<sup>1</sup>. Although it is experienced by everyone, the impact of the causes, effects and solutions is gendered<sup>2</sup>. How women and men respond, are consulted, supported and contribute, differs. The effects of climate change can magnify existing gender roles and inequities and create new vulnerabilities<sup>1</sup>. The way policy is planned, developed and implemented is important in addressing this.

For example, research in Sweden has shown that men have a larger carbon footprint as they are more likely to consume energy expensive items whereas women are more likely to purchase perishable items for domestic consumption within their families<sup>3</sup>. A European Parliament report has shown that men are more likely to make trips by car for a single purpose over long distances. Women make more short journeys for multiple purposes and are more likely to walk or use public transport<sup>3</sup>. People who are disadvantaged or on low incomes will be more vulnerable to rising costs as a result of climate change of water and electricity supply, foods and staples and petrol<sup>4</sup>. Women fall into this category. Women live longer than men, have less financial security (such as superannuation<sup>5</sup>, permanent employment or pay equity), and comprise the greater number of single parents and primary carers.

The impact of natural disasters also differs for women. Women are resilient and their knowledge, experiences and social roles function to build community strength following a disaster<sup>6</sup>. However intimate partner violence and sexual violence increase in places where natural disasters have occurred<sup>7</sup>. Some groups, such as older women (who are more likely to live alone), may be more vulnerable to extreme weather conditions and isolation. Women manage most of the household duties, shoulder carer and childcare responsibilities and undertake work and education. They are also 'ready to take action to mitigate climate change as a means of risk aversion'<sup>1</sup>. Women therefore need to be involved in all stages of program and policy design and implementation.

These are the understandings that inform our response to the Green Paper.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE CLIMATE CHANGE GREEN PAPER**

The measures set out in this Green Paper to address, for example, job creation, transport, energy efficiency and the development of green industry are crucial to be able to adapt to our changing environment. However three key points should be noted.

### **1. Moving beyond an economic focus**

The Victorian Climate Change Green Paper demonstrates a strong focus on economic concerns. While measures to support Victoria's economy and industry in the face of climate change are necessary, the impact of climate

change is much more far-reaching and complex. The broader social context of people's lives should be acknowledged. This goes beyond a focus on consumption and the market economy. Questions in this Green Paper that consider vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and health are related back to how they intersect with Victoria's economy. This is inadequate in examining the changes needed to adapt to a very different environment.

## **2. Government and corporate responsibility**

Each individual must make changes to their households and everyday consumption as we move towards a greener Victoria, however for many groups in society, this will be very difficult. Cost and resource implications should not be left to the individual to absorb alone. The corporate sector and the Government, both of whose activities make a much greater impact on the environment, must shoulder the bulk of responsibility for adaptation.

## **3. Education and awareness raising**

Questions on the provision of information are raised in the Green Paper in relation to areas such as energy efficiency and transport. Any information that is provided by the Government must be meaningful and accessible to a range of different people and communities. It should form part of a broad education campaign that should cross different government departments. It should go beyond brochures or poster campaigns to gain consensus on the seriousness of environmental issues.

## **SPECIFIC RESPONSES TO THE GREEN PAPER**

### **1. Government priorities (1.5)**

The Climate Change Priorities set out in the Green Paper are largely dominated by economic concerns. Although these are important considerations, Women's Health Victoria believes a greater focus on social objectives would acknowledge the broad-reaching effect of climate change on all aspects of the lives of Victorians.

It is anticipated that climate change, and the measures used to mitigate its effects, will result in increased costs for households, in the short-term at least. Energy bills, higher costs associated with water usage, upgrading to energy efficient living, installing water tanks and using low emission vehicles will all constitute a cost burden. The most disadvantaged and those on low incomes may struggle to accommodate this rise in costs<sup>4,8</sup>.

Women's Health Victoria recommends that the following priority be added to address this:

Address the wider health and socio-economic impacts of climate change on the lives of Victorians, including specific support that targets vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Such a priority is a necessity because much of the Green Paper focuses on the role of the individual in addressing climate change. Without adequate support, many people will be placed in a very difficult position.

**Key issues:**

- The effects of climate change are far-reaching and go beyond economic concerns.
- Climate change is a greater threat to people living in low socio-economic conditions.

**Recommendations:**

1. A new priority must be added:  
Address the wider health and socio-economic impacts of climate change on the lives of Victorians, including specific support that targets vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

## 2. Transport (3.3)

Research has shown that men are more likely to make trips by car over long distances for a single purpose and women to use public transport or walk<sup>3</sup>. Much of the transport section of the Green Paper considers modifications to private means of transport, such as cars. Strategies to reduce the number of cars on the road should be prioritised and alternative means of transport promoted.

Public transport should be central to any new urban development and existing services should be strengthened to accommodate increased demand. Comprehensive services for outer metropolitan areas of Melbourne and regional Victoria are required and public transport must be environmentally friendly, accessible and easy to use, particularly for wheelchair users, older people and parents with prams.

Walking and cycling should also be promoted and safe services such as bike paths and adequate street lighting should be incorporated into town planning in order to facilitate uptake.

**Key issues:**

- Transport use is gendered with women more likely to make shorter journeys or use public transport.

**Recommendations:**

2. There should be a much greater focus on building accessible public transport systems and encouraging alternative means of transport to cars.

## 3. The built environment (3.4)

Any action to redesign our built environment must consider the impact of the cost of adapting housing for lower socio-economic groups. Subsidies should be provided to enable this to occur. In some cases, it will not be possible to adapt existing houses, and relocation costs together with the social and emotional burden of internal displacement, should be accommodated<sup>9</sup>. Public housing should be developed as a best practice example of high quality green housing.

**Key issues:**

- Adaptations to the built environment will lead to increased costs which will have the greatest impact on low socio-economic groups.

**Recommendations:**

3. Subsidies should be provided to low income groups to enable them to make changes to their houses.
4. Public housing should be developed as a best practice example of high quality green housing.

**5. Agriculture (3.7)**

The social context of farming in Victoria must be embedded in any climate change policy that deals with agriculture. The impact of the drought on rural women is one example in which the gendered nature of climate change has become clear. In 2008, as part of a national review of the drought policy, an expert panel was appointed to investigate the social impacts of drought on farm families and rural communities<sup>10</sup>. The panel reported:

- Changes in gender roles, which included:
  - Increases in women seeking off-farm employment,
  - Increased labour contribution to the farm by women and children;
- A social cost to women who had the combined burden of their share of farm work, looking after children and off-farm work;
  - Many women also home-schooled children because of distances to or closure of schools;
- Men's coping strategies often had adverse effects on their families:
  - Women stated that their husband's response to drought and debt was to work harder and longer resulting in a decrease in family communication;
  - Women reported their husband's attitudes to working more as 'stubborn' and unrealistic about their economic situation, while men saw themselves as 'resilient';
- Women reported a sense of isolation due to the cost of fuel and loss of social contacts;
- Women reported having to be emotionally strong to hold the family together;
- Women said they received less support than men;
- Women talked about the absence of childcare services, which restricted their ability to travel for medical treatment<sup>11</sup>.

The role changes experienced by women need to be better integrated and supported by family members and external agencies, such as counselling services<sup>12</sup>. The Victorian Government's Rural Women, Drought and Climate Change initiative, introduced in October 2006, is a good example of gender responsive policy<sup>13</sup>. This was part of a strategy to support the needs of women in rural and regional areas and connect rural women to state and local government agencies. It has included:

- The Rural Women's Network, which involves:
  - A series of regional gatherings to discuss drought and climate change from a rural women's perspective;
  - A networking newsletter;
  - Initiatives around accessibility and inclusion for rural women with disabilities<sup>13</sup>; and,
- Community engagement officers responsible for building relationships, local strengths and knowledge about drought information and services<sup>14</sup>.

Any package to address the agricultural impact of climate change should consider the wider context for women, their families and rural and remote communities in Victoria.

**Key issues:**

- Farming and agriculture sit within a broader social context that impacts differently on women and men.
- The Victorian Government's Rural Women, Drought and Climate Change initiative is a good example of gender responsive policy.

**Recommendations:**

5. Any package to address the agricultural impact of climate change should build in the social context for women, their families and rural and remote communities in Victoria.

**6. Supporting adjustment to change (4.4)**

Low income and disadvantaged groups may be particularly vulnerable to the negative, short-term impact that climate change policy is likely to have. These groups – young people, older people, women, low income groups, people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous groups – are at greater risk of rising costs and must be meaningfully engaged in actions designed to address climate change. The broad social and economic impact on these groups should be considered and support provided for their adjustment<sup>15</sup>.

For example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner has stated that climate change has the 'potential to exacerbate inequality and threaten human rights'<sup>16</sup>. Congruent with all populations, the most susceptible to the effects of climate change in Indigenous groups will be women and children who, due to cultural inequities and socioeconomic disadvantages, are generally poorer and less resourced. Involving the knowledge and expertise of Indigenous Victorians in program and policy design is imperative.

Supporting adjustment to change should involve the mitigation of any financial burden of adapting houses and cars. It should also incorporate subsidies for increasing electricity and water rates. Ways of building community resilience should be addressed and the engagement of those groups likely to be affected is imperative. Such a process will also have the effect of raising awareness of climate change and building consensus about the need for change. Women must be equally represented in the participation process.

**Key issues:**

- Climate change policies may have a negative impact on low income and vulnerable populations in terms of cost and resources.

**Recommendations:**

6. Diverse communities in Victoria, and women within those communities, must be involved in planning for climate change adjustment.
7. Financial and resource burdens of adaptation for low income groups should be subsidised by Government.

## 7. Adaptation (5.0)

The role of work and business has been highlighted in this Green Paper as central to successful adaptation. It could also be a barrier for many women.

- **Role of the workplace setting**

The workplace setting represents an innovative area for awareness raising and behavior change. Sustainability strategies should be implemented within workplaces and these can also influence employees to make changes at home. These need to be pervasive, comprehensive and part of everyday practice. They represent a practical way to make local change. The development of new green industry also provides an opportunity to embed family friendly policy.

One model that could be employed is the GreenClinic pilot program developed by the Australian Conservation Foundation and Doctors for the Environment. This program aims to inform and encourage general practitioners to employ more environmentally sustainable practices in their clinics<sup>17</sup>. It begins with an education program that features presentations on current environmental issues, the role of healthcare professionals and a discussion of 10 'Greening Your Clinic' tips. This ensures a foundational level of understanding of the need for change. Education is regarded as the underlying mechanism by which change occurs. Support for programs such as these is important in helping businesses adjust and should form part of a comprehensive Government education campaign.

**Key issues:**

- The workplace setting can be used as a key tool for building awareness and behaviour change.

**Recommendations:**

8. Sustainability strategies within the workplace should be developed and family friendly policies embedded.
9. Models such as the GreenClinic pilot program should be developed and adequately funded.
10. Awareness raising within the workplace setting must form part of a broader Government-led education campaign.

## 8. Building responsive emergency services (5.4)

'Gender shapes the social worlds within which natural events occur'.<sup>18</sup> A 2007 UK study found that natural disasters do not affect people equally and that biological and physiological differences between women and men are insufficient reason to explain 'large-scale difference in mortality rates' from natural disasters and their aftermath<sup>19</sup>. Researchers attributed the difference to social norms and role behaviours, and in particular, to women's socioeconomic status. Women as a whole are more likely than men at the time of an extreme environmental event to:

- Live in poverty, rely on social services and lack savings or insurance;
- Be unemployed, work in part-time or casual roles, or the informal economy;
- Reside alone, or be rearing children alone, and be responsible for others as paid and unpaid caregivers;

- Depend on public transportation and travel with dependents;
- Reside in public housing or rental housing;
- Live at risk of assault and abuse, be displaced into domestic violence shelters;
- Physically depend on others due to late pregnancy, recent childbirth, age, chronic illness or disability; and
- Be subject to male authority in the household regarding use of emergency assistance assets and key decisions about evacuation and relocation<sup>18</sup>.

Gender as a central organising principle of social life has been overlooked by Australian bushfire researchers<sup>20</sup>. While bushfires are a seasonal threat in Australia, it is likely that the frequency of very high and extreme fire days will increase<sup>21</sup>. What little research there is about the part that gender plays in bushfire situations states that the roles people have within the family unit contribute significantly to how they behave and respond during a crisis<sup>20</sup>. This includes the role of women as primary caregivers. Greater research into the gendered nature of emergency response is required. It is important that women are consulted and that a gender lens, in which the impact of policies and events on women is considered, is used in all emergency management and policy development.

- **Natural disasters and violence against women**

The World Health Organisation reports that intimate partner violence and sexual violence increase in places where natural disasters have occurred<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, women who were subjected to violence prior to the disaster are more likely to experience increased violence after it. This may be exacerbated by separation from family, friends and other potential support and protective systems. The reasons for post-disaster violence could include:

- Increased stress and feelings of powerlessness;
- Mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder;
- The scarcity of basic provisions;
- Destruction of social networks;
- Breakdown of law enforcement;
- Cessation of violence prevention and other social support programs; and,
- Disruptions to the economy<sup>7</sup>.

The potential for violence against women and the need for appropriate services should be addressed in emergency response plans.

**Key issues:**

- Gender plays a role in responses to disaster.
- Women generally have less access to resources for disaster preparation, mitigation and rehabilitation.
- Women are at risk of increasing family violence following disaster situations.

**Recommendations:**

11. The impact of disasters and emergency responses on women should be incorporated into policy and program design.
12. Advocacy and support services for women experiencing family violence should remain a priority in emergency situations.

## 9. Health and wellbeing in a changing climate (5.5)

A recent UK study highlighted the health threat of climate change. 'Changing patterns of disease, water and food insecurity, vulnerable shelter and human settlements, extreme climatic events and population growth and migration' are anticipated<sup>9</sup>.

Indigenous Victorians, people living with chronic illness or mental health conditions or people with disabilities may be more vulnerable than others to the health impacts of climate change. Extreme weather, for example, is likely to affect vulnerable populations most of all, such as older women (which is important in light of our ageing population).

Adaptation to the possible health impacts of climate change should be informed by a social model of health. This model concentrates on improving the health and wellbeing of a population by addressing the social and environmental determinants of ill health concurrently with the biological and medical factors. It draws on key social determinants that influence broader patterns of health and illness within any given population, including socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender and geographic location. There is evidence that poor health outcomes as a result of discrimination and marginalisation occur within all of the determinants.

The impact of gender and health in diverse populations of women is significant. Gender differences in our society can influence both women's and men's:

- Exposure to risk factors;
- Access to and understanding of information about disease management, prevention and control;
- Subjective experience of illness and its social significance;
- Attitudes towards the maintenance of one's own health and that of other family members;
- Patterns of service use;
- Perceptions of quality of care.

Policies and programs that do not account for gender differences may have a detrimental impact on both women and men. The impact on the drought on the health of rural women showed this clearly. The panel set up to review national drought policy found that the drought impacted on women's health, which was further affected by them having to shoulder the emotional burden of the effects of the drought. As a result, many women reported being exhausted and without medical or social support networks to draw on<sup>11</sup>. The panel noted how a large number of health initiatives had recently focused on the needs of rural men. It was necessary to recognise and support women's health needs as well<sup>11</sup>.

Climate change has the potential to greatly impact on people's mental health as a result of 'emerging awareness of climate change as a global threat'<sup>15</sup>. The tangible effects of climate change, such as the experience of disasters, internal displacement, drought, economic insecurity and violence against women, will inevitably affect mental health<sup>9</sup>.

Other elements to consider involve health services and how to ensure that climate change is understood as a core health issue<sup>9</sup>. Measures should be introduced to ensure that health services can continue to function in extreme weather. Preventative work and targeted health promotion should be developed regarding the impacts of climate change. The capacity of the health workforce to respond to heat related health

issues or disaster response should be built on. Funding of community and women's health services should be provided so that these services can respond to increased demand, training needs and infrastructure changes (such as building adaptations).

**Key issues:**

- A social model of health is important in understanding the possible health impacts of climate change – climate change will impact on the social determinants of health.
- Policies and programs that do not account for gender differences can have a detrimental impact on both women and men.

**Recommendations:**

13. Health policy must be gender sensitive (see DHS Gender and Diversity Lens discussed at Section 11).
14. Measures should be introduced to ensure that health services can continue to function in extreme weather conditions, including workforce capacity building.
15. Vulnerable population groups should be targeted in health promotion work.
16. Additional funding to women's health services and community health services should be provided in order to respond to the increased demand related to climate change.

**10. Communities and climate change (6.1)**

Women have a central role in ensuring community and family resilience in times of environmental stress. It is important to consider the impact of climate change on women in a diverse range of communities across Victoria. These include<sup>9</sup>:

- Farmers and their families in drought-affected areas;
- Coastal communities in light of rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions;
- Communities that rely on tourism that may be affected by climate change;
- Communities affected by changes in the fossil fuel or logging industry;
- Climate change refugees from other parts of the world; and
- Internally displaced communities that have emerged as a result of ongoing economic and environmental security.

A local approach to building the resilience of communities, and one that incorporates economic and employment changes, is critical to their success. Community members must participate in the decision-making and planning process and women should be equally represented.

The barriers to changing behaviour are often gendered. As noted above, women are more likely to be primary caregivers and this impacts on work roles and financial security. This, in turn, affects women's financial security and their ability to accommodate the cost implications of climate change. There needs to be clear guidance on rights regarding work and care obligations in response to climate change. Now even more, the need for flexibility of work hours is necessary in light of potential school closures and caring for others in times of extreme weather events.

**Key issues:**

- Women's role as primary caregivers is an important and women play a key role in developing and maintaining community resilience.

**Recommendations:**

17. Clear guidance is required on rights regarding work and care obligations in climate change events.
18. The impact of climate change on a diverse range of communities should be considered in policy and program design.
19. A local approach to building the resilience of communities is critical.
20. Participation of community members in planning and decision-making should be encouraged and women should be equally represented.

**11. Making decisions in a time of climate change (6.3)**

The Climate Change Green Paper acknowledges the need for the Government to mainstream climate change in its decision-making in order to ensure that climate change concerns are central to all policy and planning. A similar tool to the Statements of Compatibility that are required by the *Charter of Rights and Responsibilities* could be introduced. This would assert the Government's commitment and leadership on the issue of climate change. It would ensure that all government departments consider the impact of their policy on the environment at the drafting stage. It would also mean that the Climate Change Bill and associated policies are a platform for ongoing and wide-reaching change.

The impact of Government decisions (including any proposed climate change legislation) on the lives of Victorians should also be considered. A useful tool which illuminates how legislative and policy decisions affect women and men in Victoria is the Department of Human Services Gender and Diversity Lens. Policies and programs need to be gender sensitive in order to deliver the most effective outcomes for both women and men and the Gender and Diversity Lens ensures this occurs in a systematic and consistent way. It considers:

- the promotion of gender analysis and principles of diversity in program, project and policy design;
- the potential impact that a program, project and policy may have on the targeted area by taking into account the cultural and gender issues; and
- the needed adjustments in the program, project and policy components to make it culturally relevant and meet gender equity objectives for all targeted groups<sup>22</sup>.

This tool could enhance the effectiveness of climate change policies, legislation and regulations by ensuring that gender (and diversity) is at the forefront of policy design and program delivery<sup>23</sup>.

**Key issues:**

- Climate change mainstreaming is an important way of embedding climate change into Government decisions.
- Policies and programs need to be gender sensitive in order to deliver the most effective outcomes for both women and men.

**Recommendations:**

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|-----|---|
| 21. | A tool similar to the Victoria Charter Statement of Compatibility could be developed to assess the environmental (and social) impact of a policy or piece of legislation. |
| 22. | The DHS Gender and Diversity Lens should be used.   |

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A new priority must be added:  
Address the wider health and socio-economic impacts of climate change on the lives of Victorians, including specific support that targets vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.
2. There should be a much greater focus on building accessible public transport systems and encouraging alternative means of transport to cars.
3. Subsidies should be provided to low income groups to enable them to make changes to their houses.
4. Public housing should be developed as a best practice example of high quality green housing.
5. Any package to address the agricultural impact of climate change should build in the social context for women, their families and rural and remote communities in Victoria.
6. Diverse communities in Victoria, and women within those communities, must be involved in planning for climate change adjustment.
7. Financial and resource burdens of adaptation for low income groups should be subsidised by Government.
8. Sustainability strategies within the workplace should be developed and family friendly policies embedded.
9. Models such as the GreenClinic pilot program should be developed and adequately funded.
10. Awareness raising within the workplace setting must form part of a broader Government-led education campaign.
11. The impact of disasters and emergency responses on women should be incorporated into policy and program design.
12. Advocacy and support services for women experiencing family violence should remain a priority in emergency situations.
13. Health policy must be gender sensitive (see DHS Gender and Diversity Lens discussed at Section 11).
14. Measures should be introduced to ensure that health services can continue to function in extreme weather conditions, including workforce capacity building.

15. Vulnerable population groups should be targeted in health promotion work.
16. Additional funding to women's health services and community health services should be provided in order to respond to the increased demand related to climate change.
17. Clear guidance is required on rights regarding work and care obligations in climate change events.
18. The impact of climate change on a diverse range of communities should be considered in policy and program design.
19. A local approach to building the resilience of communities is critical.
20. Participation of community members in planning and decision-making should be encouraged and women should be equally represented.
21. A tool similar to the Victoria Charter Statement of Compatibility could be developed to assess the environmental (and social) impact of a policy or piece of legislation.
22. The DHS Gender and Diversity Lens should be used.

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