

GREATER MELBOURNE HEAT ALLIANCE

HEAT RESILIENCE SNAPSHOT

2025-26



About this snapshot

This Heat Resilience Snapshot provides a focused overview of how extreme heat affects Greater Melbourne and what can be done to strengthen resilience across our suburbs. Melbourne is experiencing more frequent and intense heatwaves, revealing deep vulnerabilities in the city's built environment and services. By combining current data, community insights and policy analysis, this snapshot highlights who is most at risk, where gaps remain, and the actions already underway through the Greater Melbourne Heat Alliance (GMHA), a network of community organisations, health services, unions, and local governments formed in 2023, working together to improve heat resilience across the city. It aims to support collaboration across government, community and industry to build a cooler, fairer and more heat-resilient Melbourne.

This report has been prepared by Sweltering Cities in collaboration with Alliance partners.



Rising temperatures

Victoria is set to expect a 2.4°C temperature increase by 2050 and up to 4.3°C by 2090 if greenhouse gas emissions remain high ([DELWP, 2019](#))



Heatwave related deaths

An additional 402 heatwave related deaths are estimated annually by 2050 unless actions are taken ([Keating & Handmer, 2013](#); [Department of Health and Human Services, 2024](#))



Excessive heat

Excessive natural heat is the leading cause of weather-related hospitalisations and death in all states and territories in Australia, except Tasmania ([The Australia Institute, 2024](#))



People with disabilities

Studies have shown that 89% of heatwave deaths in Australia are people with disability ([Disability Advocacy Network Australia, 2024](#))



Tree canopy cover

The western suburbs averaged less than 6% tree canopy, while eastern suburbs averaged around 26% ([Kinsella, 2023](#))



Heat related mortality

At +3.0°C of global warming heat related mortality expected to increase by 259% in Melbourne compared to current conditions ([Australia Climate Service, 2025](#))

Why Do We Need Local Leadership?



Local leadership is critical to heat resilience because councils and community organisations can deliver targeted, place-based solutions and coordinate rapid responses that state-level policies alone cannot achieve.

“**Communities are coming together to create a ground swell to combat what the government and system has politicised and ignored for too long.**

Shweta Dakin, Manager of Resilient Communities at Genwest

Local councils

Councils across the city are leading innovative heat resilience. For example, [Glen Eira](#), [Merri-Bek](#), [Greater Dandenong](#) and other councils have created heat action plans and response strategies tailored to their residents.

City of Melbourne

The City of Melbourne is integrating climate adaptation into planning and host Australia’s only [Chief Heat Officers](#) who drive initiatives that protect vulnerable groups during heatwaves and foster cross-sector collaboration. The “[Cool Routes](#)” tool helps residents navigate cooler, shaded walking and cycling paths during hot weather, improving safety, comfort and accessibility on extreme heat days.

Sweltering Cities

The Sweltering Cities [2024 Summer Survey](#) found that 3 in 5 Victorian respondents have air conditioning but are not turning it on because of concerns with cost, 94% of respondents who were renters with a disability or chronic illness said they feel unwell on hot days, and 84% said cost of living pressures are making it harder to keep cool.

Local Heat Resilience Leadership

GMHA organisation VCOSS provide clear evidence that heat risk is unevenly distributed across Melbourne, highlighting why place-based, community led actions such as the work that Banksia Gardens do, are so important.

Banksia Gardens Community Services

Banksia Gardens, located in Broadmeadows delivers programs on environment, food security, and social justice.

Their program, Climate Adaptation Requires Youth Action (CARYA) is an 8-week youth program (launched 2020) that educates, empowers and connects young people to take meaningful climate and sustainability action in their community.



Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS)

“Households earning up to \$7,799 per year live in an area 0.6°C hotter on average than households earning over \$156,000 per year” (Latham, 2023).

VCOSS’s report ‘A Comparison Of Disadvantage and Urban Heat Island Effect In Melbourne, Australia’ (2023) shows that **Melbourne’s poorest suburbs are consistently among its hottest.** This is driven by inequality in household resources and in the disparate impact of the Urban Heat Island effect.

Area	Urban heat	Low Income
Brimbank	10.75	29.00%
Melton	10.7	20.90%
Casey	10.7	20.80%
Moonee Valley	9.63	20.20%
Whittlesea	9.4	23.10%
Maribyrnong	9.35	20.40%
Greater Dandenong	9.26	30.80%
Hume	9.23	28.50%
Merri-bek (Moreland)	9.2	19.60%
Wyndham	9.18	20.30%
Kingston	9.05	16.30%
Glen Eira	8.63	14.30%
Darebin	8.53	21.00%
Monash	8.43	16.60%
Yarra	8.27	14.90%
Banyule	8.25	15.20%
Frankston	8.23	19.80%
Manningham	7.95	17.40%
Hobsons Bay	7.94	18.90%
Melbourne	7.94	17.60%
Whitehorse	7.93	17.60%
Stonnington	7.56	10.90%
Knox	7.52	16.80%
Boroondara	7.5	11.20%
Port Phillip	7.4	11.80%
Bayside	7.36	10.10%

The most disadvantaged LGAs based on urban heat and income level from VCOSS research in 2024.

Progress & Overall Performance

32 GMHA organisation representatives shared their perspectives on securing policy action and investment for heat resilience in Melbourne.

“ *It shouldn't be a matter of privilege to be safe in your home during extreme heat.*

81.3% of respondents **do not think** that communities most affected by extreme heat are receiving sufficient funding and support to build resilience.

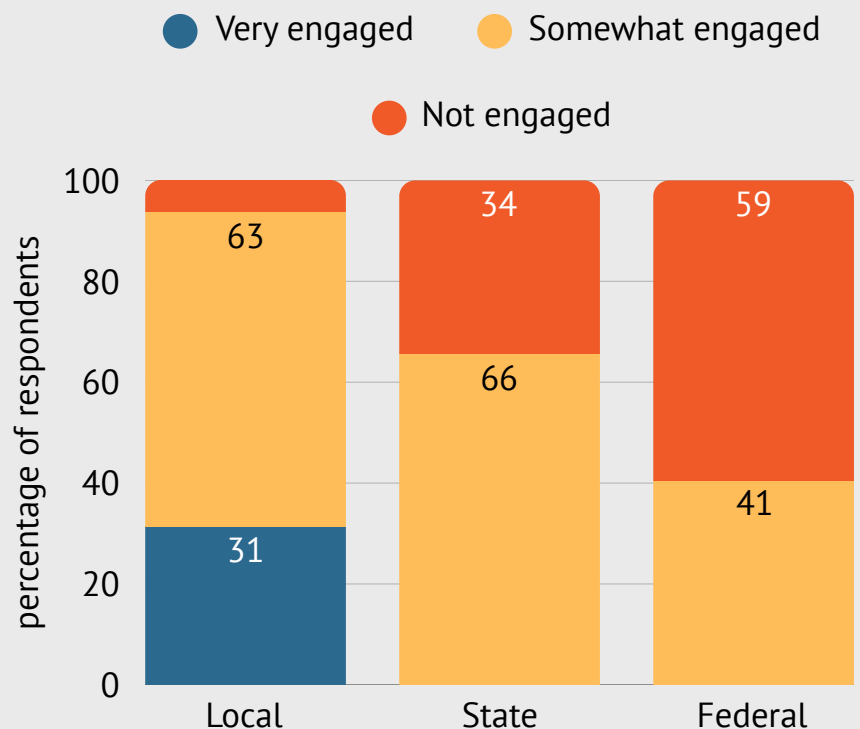
✦ **71.9%** of respondents think that Greater Melbourne has made some progress on heat resilience over the past 3 years, while 18.8% said there has been little progress.

✦ **71.9%** of respondents believe that the Government's current level of investment in heat resilience across Melbourne is **limited** or **fragmented**.

Government Engagement

GMHA members rated the three levels of government on engagement in heat resilience.

There is a low level of confidence amongst members across all levels of government, especially at the federal level.



Future Priorities

A sector-by-sector view helps identify where resilience is strongest, where improvements need to be prioritised, and where targeted action can reduce system-wide stress during extreme heat.

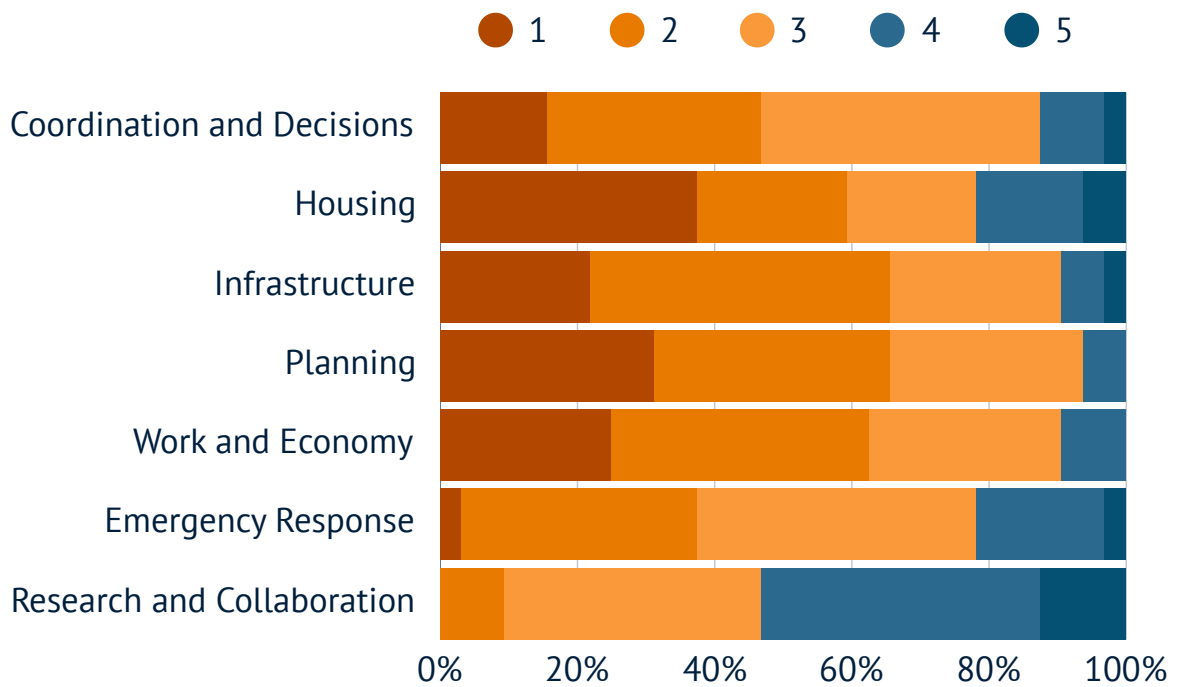
“ *As heatwave risks grow across Melbourne, we must recognise this as an emergency priority and act with coordination, urgency, and shared purpose to protect our communities.*”
 - Radha Wagle, Glen Eira City Council

GMHA members think that upgrades to social and rental housing should be a top priority for improvement in Melbourne, followed by support for community-led resilience programs.



Sector-by-Sector Resilience

Survey respondents were asked to rate different sectors on a scale of 1-5 in terms of their resilience. This graph shows that housing and planning received the lowest ratings.



Key Insights

Across sectors there is significant variation in the reported experiences of heat resilience preparedness, understanding and capability. Emergency response and research sectors are viewed as comparatively stronger, while housing, planning and coordination are sectors that would benefit from intervention. This indicates systemic responses are largely focused on responding to heat impacts, as opposed to harm prevention through resilient housing stock, urban design and long term, climate adaptive planning.

Statements from GMHA Organisations

When asked to make one statement on Melbourne's progress on heat resilience, GMHA members said:

"The heat is looming each summer and the question is where will people go and how will we manage to survive, people are dying from the heat!" - Carmen Lahiff-Jenkins, Span Community House

"To build heat resilience, Melbourne should draw on the knowledge and lived experience of its communities— sharing and learning from their approaches to managing heat stress and its impacts, whether informed by practices from other countries or by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge of this land." - Mahesh Geetha, ACTU

"While there is a stronger narrative and greater understanding of heat related risks for our city, these conversations are happening in silos. As someone who works in food systems, it is scary at how little planning we have done to ensure communities are able to nourish themselves at all times of the year. Our supply chains that are tied up in the supermarket duopoly and built on a 'just in time' model, means that there is no resilience to accommodate for any shocks and stressors." - Dheepa Jeyapalan, Regen Melbourne

"Setting minimum standards for rental homes like insulation and cooling is a huge step forward - but we need to address the barriers to climate resilient homes that still exist for too many people in our community." - Rob McLeod, Energy Efficiency Council

Barriers and gaps

“There's an absence of a strong gender lens on heat resilience programs and responses across the board. Without this, women (such as single mothers, older women living alone and pregnant women) are falling through the cracks. - Pasanna Mutha, Women's Environmental Leadership Australia

"Despite small wins in local heat initiatives, Greater Melbourne's approach to heat resilience still sidesteps deeper structural injustices, favouring short-term projects and individual behaviour change over the long-term, community-shaped investment in housing, energy, and social infrastructure that fair and equitable resilience requires." - Kate Lowsby, Jesuit Social Services Centre for Just Places

Gaps, Risks and Opportunities

Housing

Melbourne's housing is poorly designed for heat, with weak building standards, limited retrofitting, high energy costs and inadequate public and rental housing, leaving vulnerable residents unsafe during heatwaves. Stronger building and rental standards, targeted retrofits for heat-vulnerable households, and affordable access to efficient cooling are urgently needed.

Coordination

Heat resilience efforts remain siloed or inadequately coordinated across levels of government and different departments and agencies. Poor coordination undermines integrated responses and investment. Clear leadership, defined responsibilities and integrated planning across all levels of government are essential to deliver effective heat responses.

Coordinated heat resilience shifts the focus from emergency response to long-term prevention, reducing the recurring strain on our communities and essential services. Achieving this requires sustained investment, clear government leadership, and inclusive, community-led action to ensure a cooler, fairer Melbourne for everyone.

Funding

Heat resilience is constrained by short-term, fragmented funding that prioritises pilots over permanence. Ongoing investment is lacking for community-led adaptation, high-risk areas, housing retrofits and critical infrastructure. Long-term, dedicated funding streams are required to scale proven solutions and support sustained, place-based heat resilience.

Inclusive Approach

Communities most affected by heat are insufficiently involved in decision-making. Lack of equity, gender and disability lenses, alongside limited community consultation, leaves older people, renters and marginalised groups unsupported. Embedding equity, lived experience and community leadership in heat policy and funding decisions is critical to closing these gaps.



The Greater Melbourne Heat Alliance is a network of over 40 organisations driving systemic solutions and strategic leadership for heatwave resilience. By fostering collective learning and the sharing of critical resources, we empower our networks to implement evidence-based preparedness and advocate for the policy reforms needed to protect Melbourne's future.

Get in touch or learn more:

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