



# **Climate Health WA Inquiry**

## **Inquiry into the impacts of climate change on health in Western Australia**

**Inquiry Lead:**  
**Dr Tarun Weeramanthri**

**Witnesses:**

**Mr Louise Giolitto**  
**Chief Executive Officer, WA Council of Social Service**

**Mr Graham Hansen**  
**Senior Policy Officer, WA Council of Social Service**

**Thursday, 12 December 2019**

[13:00:07]

HEARING COMMENCED

5 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Ms Giolitto, Mr Hansen, I would like to  
thank you both for your interest in the Inquiry and for your appearance at  
today's hearing. The purpose of the hearing is to assist me in gathering  
evidence for the Climate Health WA Inquiry into the impacts of climate change  
10 on health in Western Australia. My name is Tarun Weeramanthri and I have  
been appointed by the Chief Health Officer to undertake the Inquiry. Beside  
me is Dr Sarah Joyce, the Inquiry's Project Director. If everyone could please  
be aware that the use of mobile phones and other recording devices is not  
permitted in this room, so please make sure that your phone is on silent or  
switched off.

15 This hearing is a formal procedure convened under section 231 of the *Public  
Health Act 2016*. While you are not being asked to give your evidence under  
oath or affirmation, it is important you understand that there are penalties under  
the Act for knowingly providing a response or information that is false or  
20 misleading. This is a public hearing and a transcript of your evidence will be  
made for the public record. If you wish to make a confidential statement  
during today's proceedings, you should request that that part of your evidence  
be taken in private. You have previously been provided with the Inquiry's  
terms of reference and information on giving evidence to the Inquiry. Before  
25 we begin, do you have any questions about today's hearing?

MS GIOLITTO: None from me.

30 MR HANSEN: No questions.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: For the transcript, could I ask each of you  
to state your name and the capacity in which you are here today?

35 MS GIOLITTO: Louise Giolitto, CEO of the WA Council  
of Social Service.

MR HANSEN: Graham Hansen, Senior Policy Officer,  
WA Council of Social Service.

40 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Ms Giolitto, would you like to make a  
brief opening statement?

45 MS GIOLITTO: Yes, please. I'd like to thank you for this  
opportunity to provide a written submission and to speak today. WACOSS is  
the peak body for community service sector and represents more than  
500 organisations involved in the provision of community services to people in  
WA. Central to the work of WACOSS is our vision for an inclusive, just and  
equitable society. We contend that, unchecked and unaddressed, climate  
change blows our vision out of the water. Everywhere we look, climate change  
50 entrenches disadvantage. Those who have contributed the least to causing it,  
who are now the ones who will be, and already are being, hit the hardest.

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That is true both globally, and when we consider the way that industrialisation has happened worldwide, but also within our country, and within our state.

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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. As the peak body for the community service sector in Western Australia, which groups do you see as the most vulnerable to health impacts of climate change, and why?

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MS GIOLITTO: People living in poverty are particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change, with the fewest protection and often living in the most affected places. Poverty significantly increases people's susceptibility to poor health and wellbeing, outcomes resulting from climate hazards such as heatwave, drought, floods, cyclones and wildfires. I think it's interesting to note we're currently in a four-day heatwave here in Western Australia, and in Murray Street Mall, the City Council, plus community service providers, are handing out bottles of water to those who are most vulnerable in our community at the moment, knowing this has a huge health implication, especially to those living on the streets.

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Overrepresentation amongst people living in poverty are single parents, older people in rental accommodation, people relying on income support payments, public housing tenants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability, adults and people born from non-English speaking backgrounds. Fundamentally, the reason people in poverty are the most vulnerable is because they have the least ability to cope and adapt and recover from the impacts of climate change. That access to resources, disposable income, choices of power and social connections are all really limited.

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And as already said, these impacts make it even harder to move out of poverty. The physical and mental health impacts make it harder to work, undermine their employment opportunities and their income earning potential, and also makes it harder to engage in activities like education, which should assist in securing a high-wage job. And again, I'll make note of people who are living on the streets and who are homeless – their mental health deteriorates dramatically and also their physical health, so your ability to find work and move your way out of entrenched poverty is unimaginable.

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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: I might just ask you a question about the period of the year in which you see the most demand for your services. We've heard from other social care providers that the summer, actually, is the peak period of demand from people who are homeless et cetera, rather than the winter. That came as a bit of a surprise to us, we hadn't really thought about that before. Is that your experience?

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MS GIOLITTO: I think a lot of this is to do with the climate and the weather here in Western Australia. So you think, in regards to the further that you travel up north, so what's our winter down here is a

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5 beautiful summer up there. Therefore, if you aren't sleeping rough, it's definitely not easy, I don't want to put that on the record in any shape or form, but it doesn't hit you as hard. And we don't have extreme cold weather here in Perth, so it definitely is the heat where people are impacted a lot more than in the colder weather, due to the pure nature of our climate here in Western Australia.

10 But it's consistent all the way through. So extreme heat and cold. We hear lots of stories during the winter, again, with elderly, single parents, people on very low incomes, who can't afford to heat their homes. They're having their gas cut off, so they can't even afford, you know, to turn their stoves on or to cook. And they have a roof over their heads, but their ability to even cook a healthy meal for themselves becomes extremely limited. But extreme heat, I think, is 15 one of our biggest concerns here in WA. I think up north, and when you go inland to places like Meekatharra, you know, where the temperature gets well over 47 degrees and you have no ability to cool off whatsoever, the health risks are extreme for those people.

20 MR HANSEN: Summers also tend to be when we have a number of public holidays and festive occasions, which means that you're more likely to get lots of people coming together at once, which puts increased pressure on low-income households, if they're, you know, families or looking 25 after lots of people at once, energy bills and things like that, they will then go through the roof. Or providing food for a whole range of people, there's the increased pressures that you often don't see during the rest of the year. So it adds extra pressures during that period of time.

30 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. This Inquiry held a special forum in conjunction with WACOSS at St Pat's in Fremantle, on September the 19th, 2019, where the focus was on the lived experience of those who are currently homeless. Can you describe the outcomes from that workshop, and/or outline how climate change might impact this group, the homeless in 35 particular?

MS GIOLITTO: Graham, can you please answer that?

40 MR HANSEN: Sure. So 15 people with lived experience of homelessness were brought together to provide their perspectives at that forum. And I think it's important to recognise that homelessness takes many forms, and the impacts of climate change will be different for those who are street present, sleeping in cars, couch surfing, staying in emergency accommodation or a boarding house. People who are street present, as Louise 45 has said, have a high level of exposure to extreme weather events, or people sleeping in cars, for instance, face significant risks associated with heat stress. There are also limited places that they're able to seek shelter during the day.

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5 And when they try to seek refuge from say, the heat, by seeking shade by the entrance of a building, or access places with air-conditioning, like libraries, cinemas or shops, they're very liable to be moved on, making even strategies like those quite difficult to sustain.

10 For those who aren't street present, they may be seeking refuge in substandard housing with poor ventilation and no or inadequate air-conditioning, and those accommodation places also are quite likely to be overcrowded. All of those factors, obviously, create health risks for those people. Further, many people experiencing homelessness are already living with pre-existing mental and physical health conditions, with the impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat, increasing the risks associated with those conditions. What tends to be a unifying feature for all people experiencing homelessness, no matter what type of homelessness it may be, is a lack of control over their living situation, fundamentally, and this lack of control makes it exceptionally difficult to be able to respond or adapt to the impacts of climate change.

20 **PROF WEERAMANTHRI:** In your submission, you've provided some concrete data on income and expenditure patterns at a household level, including for low-income households in WA. What does that data tell us about essential versus discretionary spending and any financial stresses that might arise from climate change?

25 **MR HANSEN:** Sure. So housing, food, transport and utilities are respectively the largest costs, on average, for households, and the hardest ones for them to reduce. Energy use is probably the most obvious area that will contribute to increased financial stress arising from climate change, as households will need to run air-conditioners and fans longer and more intensively, as heatwaves become more frequent and last longer. The health and wellbeing impacts of restricting energy use to minimise costs for households on low incomes have already been seen, and are only likely to increase as a result of climate change. We know that people on low incomes live in hardship, spend disproportionately more in central services. Analysis that ACOSS and Brotherhood of St Laurence conducted, for instance, found people on low incomes spent, on average, 6.4 per cent of their income on energy, compared to households in the highest income quintile, who spend, on average, only 1.5 per cent.

40 Further, one in four low-income households were found to be paying over 8.8 per cent of their income on energy. For the last three years, WACOSS has analysed income expenditure data provided by financial counselling agencies from households who access their services. Financial counselling is a free and independent service to assist people who are experiencing financial difficulty. What this data makes very clear is that what is often cut in order to cover that essential expenditure is spending on recreation, education and health – all areas which clearly have an impact on the quality of life and personal wellbeing of

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5 those households. In our analysis of the 2018–19, data, which we will be, in fact, releasing tomorrow, we saw that the average expenditure share for those households who had access to financial counselling, on recreation was 0.7 per cent, compared to the 11 per cent average for WA households in the ABS household expenditure survey. They also had lower expenditure shares for education and health. This was driven significantly by their much larger share of expenditure on housing and utilities.

10 On housing alone, they were dedicating 45.5 per cent, on average, to covering it, while the average household in the HES data dedicates just 26 per cent. The households receiving financial counselling that were below the poverty line had a housing expenditure share of 50 per cent, and they were spending an average of 72.3 per cent of their incomes to cover their housing costs. Food insecurity and skipping meals is another way that these financial stresses often manifest. And during consultations we conducted earlier this year, we spoke to a number of people experiencing hardship, and often heard stories from people having to find alternative ways of ensuring they could access food.

20 One person spoke of catching public transport daily to buy ice to keep their food fresh as they waited for a donated refrigerator to arrive. So there are many stories like this in our state, where people are not only unable to preserve their food, but also struggle to afford healthy and nutritious food in the first place. Often, it is adults, and particularly parents, bearing the brunt of food insecurity. Regional and remote communities are a third more likely to experience food insecurity than those living in capital cities, and children are especially vulnerable in those communities. Aboriginal people also experienced significantly higher levels of food insecurity across both the metropolitan and regional and remote areas.

30 MS GIOLITTO: I haven't brought these with me, but I'd like to submit two reports. One is WACOSS has just released a food insecurity report that we've done with the WA Department of Health, that shows the level of food insecurity in this state. So we will submit that. And another one is called the *100 Families*, where an intense survey was done of 400 families, just in the Perth metropolitan area, and one of the biggest findings out of those 400 families was food insecurity. I believe it's estimated around 50 per cent were not eating three meals a day, and at least 50 per cent were going without food to enable... to feed their children, and that doesn't include a healthy food... often, it is food that will fill you, such as noodles and bread. So it's not necessarily healthy food. So they're two documents I'd like to submit.

45 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: We'd be happy to receive them, thank you. Part of our job is to describe the links between climate change, and ultimately the physical and mental health impacts, and your data is very helpful to us in terms of finding the pathways that flow between those, because it's  
[13:15:01]

5 easy to say it in general, but your data helps us track exactly how it is that it  
might lead to a food insecurity issue, or whatever, so thank you for that. You  
mentioned in your written submission the situation of people in rental  
accommodation and public housing. How are these groups particularly  
affected?

10 MR HANSEN: So we know that both private rental  
accommodation and public housing are much more likely to be energy  
inefficient. Poor quality housing is a substantial driver of people's experience  
of utility stress, and energy poverty significantly undermines their capacity to  
be climate resilient. Common features of poor quality housing affecting  
15 people's ability to be climate resilient includes lack of insulation, energy  
inefficient or faulty heating, cooling and water systems, and structural issues  
exposing the dwelling to the weather. A 2016 report by the Bankwest Curtin  
Economic Centre on energy poverty in WA found that rental housing was  
significantly less likely to be insulated, meaning that renters were more likely  
to be using more power to regulate the temperature in their dwellings.

20 The lack of insulation and other energy efficiency measures in rental properties  
is fundamentally the result of the split incentive issue, where tenants get the  
benefit of the lower energy bills, while property owners are the ones  
responsible for paying for the property upgrades and unlikely to see any  
immediate benefit. In a competitive rental market, they may be able to charge  
25 higher rents or they may see an improvement to the value of their property  
when they sell, but neither is particularly guaranteed. The ability to access  
technologies like rooftop solar is also not equal, where many on lower incomes  
or in rental housing have fewer opportunities to benefit from the reduced  
consumption that solar can provide. As a result, increases in utility costs tend  
30 to have a disproportionate impact on those households. Providing those  
households with the resources to become more energy efficient through home  
audits and appliance upgrades can have a significant impact, and there are  
many programs in the eastern states that improve household energy efficiency  
for those on low incomes and in rental accommodations. These include the  
35 Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme, the Victorian Energy Upgrades  
program, the Healthy Homes Program and the New South Wales Climate  
Change Fund. Western Australia, however, has not had a similar scheme in  
place since the axing of the Hardship Efficiency Program in 2012.

40 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: You'd be aware that there's a climate  
change discussion paper that was put out by the state government consultation  
which closed last week, which is the basis of a proposed state climate policy.  
Can I just ask whether you've put in a submission to that discussion paper?

45 MR HANSEN: Yes, we have, yes.

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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: So presumably, some of the points you're making would be applicable in that sphere, as well.

5 MR HANSEN: Absolutely.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. We're going to get to some of the, kind of, capacity building issues just a bit later. I just want to stick with the, kind of, practical impact that you can describe for the moment. You talked about vulnerable groups and, Ms Giolitto, you went through and described a number. We've also been made aware that there's people who don't fit into those particular categories, but who might be socially isolated for various reasons, who might also be affected. And I'm just wondering if you could talk about the concept of social isolation and how that magnifies these impacts. Is that something you talk about?

MS GIOLITTO: Social isolation has a big impact, primarily on people's mental health, which also affects your physical health, ultimately. And loneliness, I think, is an issue, especially for people who are aging, especially for sole parents, and especially for people in regional WA. It's not an area we've done a great deal of work on, but there's definitely impacts on that front. Would there be anything you'd like to add, Graham?

MR HANSEN: Yes. So I suppose, from the consultations I mentioned earlier, that we had done earlier in the year, one of the key things that came out, particularly from areas such as, like in the City of Swan, where you've got some of those outer suburban areas like, we'd say, your Ellenbrooks and things like that, social isolation tends to be a significant issue in those communities. A lot of the time, because when they were constructed, they weren't necessarily constructed with that social infrastructure lens being applied. You know, they've got lots of physical infrastructure, but those services weren't necessarily considered as part of how they're connected together.

And because those areas tend to also be where people on low incomes get driven because they can't afford rents or housing closer to the city, it means you tend to have a potential high proportion of low-income people in those suburbs without those social connections, which then makes it significantly harder for people to move beyond being in poverty, or even to deal with issues like climate change, because they don't have those social connections where they're going to be getting information from. We know, a lot of the time, that the sources that people turn to most are family and friends, then, you know, online sources and things like that. But if they're not having those close connections, it's a lot harder for people to seek help and a lot harder to get advice.

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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: I was struck by some really simple stuff about people who are, you know, disadvantaged being at home more, and so actually, kind of, spending more of their life inside and therefore... and in hot days et cetera, that is magnified again. So literally it's too hot to go outside, you're even more trapped inside your house. You may or may not be able to afford air-conditioning et cetera. So some of those very simple pathways where, you know, you've described, kind of, how climate change exacerbates existing conditions, I think, you know, we're collecting some stories about how that actually works in practice.

Ms Giolitto, you did mention mental health, and obviously, there's a big... or there are a number of different ways this issue can impact your mental health. Is it something you've looked at as an organisation, either generally or specifically, in relation to these issues?

MS GIOLITTO: There's no piece of work we have specifically done in relation to this. It's more about the feedback that we actually get from our members. So this is more of a conversation, than we've got actual hard evidence on this. But it's definitely feedback we have from our members, in regards to the people that they're providing services to and the people that are actually presenting to them, mental health issues is actually on the incline. And I'll just take one subset, for example. Aboriginal people and the lived trauma that they've had in their life that passed from one generation to the next to the next to the next. So again, if you go to a regional town or regional WA where there's... somewhere like Roebourne or Karratha or Newman, where there is such entrenched poverty amongst those Aboriginal communities, the death rate... and we know Aboriginal people die at a much earlier age.

So it's not uncommon for a young person or a child, to go to four or five funerals in one year alone of a close family member. It's not unheard of. It's actually quite common. That's going to have an impact on your mental health. But your whole view of life, if you're a 10-year-old or an eight-year-old and you're seeing that each and every year, that's going to impact your mental health and moving forward. So intergenerational trauma amongst Aboriginal families who are in entrenched poverty. But even for those who aren't, for those Aboriginal families and people, and there's more of them who are actually working, the trauma that they actually see in their own families will be impacting them and their mental health.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Just one last, kind of, specific issue, if I may. We have heard from People with Disabilities at one of the recent hearings. And I did notice, you did mention the cost of medical devices in terms of energy costs in your submission. And so part of what we've heard already is that people living with disabilities actually have increased costs, and a whole lot of stuff that they have to have at home for their activities of daily [13:24:09]

living. And so in an evacuation, it's actually quite a big ask to, you know, get out of your home or to have these services at an evacuation centre et cetera. Some very practical things about having to move yourself plus your equipment and supplies. Did you want to talk... have you got any data that specifically relates to people with disabilities?

MR HANSEN: I don't think we have a particular data set that outlines those particular issues. It was definitely something that we have heard anecdotally, though, has been... There's, I mean, as you say, the increased costs, and also while there are concession arrangements in place to try and address some of that, they're not necessarily adequate to cover the fluctuations that can happen through... you know, you get a lump sum payment that doesn't necessarily address the fact that your energy use can be skyrocketing during certain parts of the year, which has a... yes, a significant impact on adding extra stresses on top of the stresses that they are already experiencing.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Part of WACOSS's role is in building the capacity of community service organisations. And you describe a benchmarking tool on the ACOSS Resilient Community Organisations website, which 96 WA organisations used to self-assess from 2017 to 2018. Could you comment on the board or management awareness in these organisations of the links between climate change and risk of natural disasters, and whether you think that awareness has grown recently?

MR HANSEN: So based on the data from that tool, we know that 45 per cent of those organisations reported that their organisations board of management were either not aware or not very aware of the likely consequences of climate change and the frequency and severity of natural disasters in the future. Thirty-six per cent that reported that their board of management were not aware or not very aware of the phases and roles and managing risks to communities in disasters and emergencies. In regards to whether that awareness is grown, we know that around 90 per cent of those organisations that used the tool reported that they had a better understanding of what disaster preparedness was about following the use of it, and areas of their organisation needed to improve, although only 72 per cent indicated that they knew exactly what they needed to do next to work on improving their disaster preparedness.

Alongside that benchmarking tool, though, a series of one-day workshops was also delivered around the state, and the trainer who delivered those workshops for WACOSS reported that the workshops raised participants' awareness of the impacts of climate change and the need to make preparations for a likely increase in the frequency and severity of disasters into the future. For many participants, it was their first experience with their local emergency management plans and disaster recovery plans, and the people responsible for compiling them.

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5 Even in small community locations around the state, participants were meeting others for the first time and establishing contacts that they intended to follow up to build a local emergency management committee.

10 What this really highlighted, though, was the need for a comprehensive state-wide approach to the needs of people who are at most risk in disasters, much like the Victorian Vulnerable People in Emergencies Policy. While the feedback from that training and those that used the tool was very encouraging, what it indicated to us, also, was – and what we've heard a bit more anecdotally – is that organisations are increasingly aware of the links between climate change and natural disasters, but there's still a distance to go, perhaps, to ensure that those organisations have the capacity to be able to respond to all of those events.

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20 Increases in the severity of extreme climate events in WA will lead to increased pressures for support, and local community-based services are often called upon to play a critical role in disaster response, particularly during the recovery phase. To be effective, it's crucial that they have the necessary knowledge, capacity and networks, and are connected with key authorities and formal disaster response plans. But retaining and developing that capacity can be a challenge for those organisations, particularly when they're attempting to stretch the funding they receive to try and keep up with growing demand for services, which we would anticipate would just increase also as the severity of extreme climate events grows in WA.

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30 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: We're asking questions of witnesses at the, kind of, operational, the policy and the strategic/board levels. And it's certainly our feeling that all of those discussions need to be had and then link, and, you know, it's great to get some, again, some data on that level of awareness. And also, the fact that your training tends to build that awareness in and of itself, I think you're saying.

35 MS GIOLITTO: I must state that training's now ended. We got a one-off small grant that allowed us to do it for a year so we're no longer providing that training.

40 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Okay, thank you. This Inquiry will make a number of recommendations for government to consider, including ones on governance and leadership. Can you reflect on your general experience of the value of partnerships between civil society organisations, such as yourselves, and government, and whether such partnership models should be considered in addressing this complex issue that involves a range of sectors, not just health?

45 MS GIOLITTO: The importance of strong partnerships between civil society and government cannot be overstated, and we could certainly recommend a partnership model as part of addressing the issue.

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5 WACOSS has been involved in many partnership arrangements with government. At least the most recent one that's been occurring for the past two years, called the Supporting Communities Forum, which has 12 representatives from the community service sector leaders and eight director generals of relevant departments. The overarching purpose of the Supporting Communities Forum – is to build a collaborative partnership – should be developed and implemented at a social policy and community service reform agenda that is granted in relationships of partnership and mutual respect between the public and the community service sector, and is focused on achieving better outcomes for the WA community, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

15 At the end of the day, the community service sector and government are here to serve the public and serve the community, so we all have that in common. The Supporting Communities Forum is just one example, and I'd like to bring attention to, when it works well, what can actually be achieved. Yesterday was the launch of the End Homelessness Strategy, a 10-year strategy that was a collaborative approach between the community service sector and state government, primarily Department of Communities, but it also included Mental Health and it also included Health. So it was across government agencies. During this period of developing this strategy, we shifted from the belief that we can reduce homelessness to end homelessness. And as a result, we've seen a commitment.

30 And part of the End Homelessness Strategy is a housing-first approach. So if we're going to end homelessness, you've got to have roofs to put over people's heads. And part of that commitment straight up from the State Government, that's been released last week, was an additional 300 more social housing. And that's a significant increase that we haven't seen in over 10 years. And that's as a result of the strategy that's been developed by the community service sector and government working in partnership. So it can achieve fantastic results when we're all driving for the same goal at the end of the day. Also around the state we have regional manager forums and district leadership groups, at the start of a collaboration approach in our regional services delivery, and they combine representatives from local government, State Government, sometimes Commonwealth Government, but definitely the community service organisations and also Aboriginal-controlled organisations.

40 Their activities involve regional collaboration and coordination of their efforts and resources on local initiatives, provision of timely and accurate local information to government and other key stakeholders, and fostering partnerships to coordinate services, measure impact and share expertise and resources. What's really important about district leadership groups and their potential – it's yet to be achieved – is it can be locally driven. So finding out what are the key needs within that community. West Australia is a very vast

state, so the needs of Albany are very, very different to the needs of Kununurra.

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5 So the solutions need to be locally driven, and again by people who are there to serve the public, which includes government and the community service sector.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: That's a great example of a partnership that's working incredibly well, so thank you.

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MS GIOLITTO: I'll send you a copy of that along with the other two documents, as well, the Homelessness Strategy.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. You did mention disaster preparedness and your role with community organisations, obviously, in that space. And you talked in your written submission about the changing nature of volunteering. Is there any observations you'd like to make about that with respect to disasters? We're having a bit of a national discussion about that at the moment.

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MR HANSEN: I think that comes back to a capacity issue for a lot of those organisations that have traditionally relied on a combination of paid staff and volunteers. It's a lot harder for a number of them to get volunteers now, partly because of changing nature of work, as well as volunteering; it's a lot harder for people to potentially find the time to give to volunteering. And the pressures that then are seen also on older people, I guess, in community, who are often being relied upon to deliver some of that volunteering work. And as a result, if they've got reduced capacity because they don't have volunteers, it makes it a lot harder for them to then be able to act in those scenarios.

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MS GIOLITTO: One of the key examples during a natural disaster where there could be a great improvement that could be quite simple – sorry, I can't remember the year – but the fires down south a few years ago. And the community came out in droves wanting to support those people. Red Cross and St Vincent de Paul are the two good examples. They were bombarded with clothes and blankets and toys, more than what they could actually take on and more than what the community actually needed. It ended up costing those services – the collection, and where they were to go.

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WACOSS has a database, it's called ER Connect, which is... anybody in the community can access it. It could be a teacher, it could be a nurse or the community service sector. And it's a database where people can go and... it's really simple. You type in your location, and you might be looking for a financial counsellor, you might be looking for food relief, and it will present your local provider. In the times of natural disaster, that database could be expanded upon and it could also be a filter for people wanting to help, wanting to volunteer, wanting to provide goods or services, but it happens as a

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coordinated approach and through a digital solution. So those communities are getting the help that's actually needed at that particular point in time, not five [13:36:17]

5 trucks of blankets and clothes which the community don't actually need. So I don't think we, as a state, we've used, in this particular space around disaster, or even in emergency relief, we're using our digital platforms as we could, like you see in the commercial...

10 PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Could I just check with you what ER stands for in ER Connect.

MS GIOLITTO: It stands for emergency relief. So the name of the – I'm trying to think of the word – the name of the portal is called ER Connect and it's public, and it's heavily used.  
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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: You started talking about, at the beginning of the hearing, about the thing you said... the people in the mall handing out bottles of water to homeless people during this heatwave. And clearly, we've talked a lot of people around the organised response to heat and heatwaves. And that in this state's been, kind of, formally planned and responded to for the last, probably, six, seven or eight years. But is there any way that you think the response could be better targeted to meet the needs of disadvantaged people and vulnerable groups? At the moment, you get a, kind of, you know, state-wide calling of a heatwave emergency, I'm sure you get organisations kicking in. Is there anything we can do better?  
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MS GIOLITTO: I believe this is a systemic and a structural issue, that we're not providing people with good social housing or they're locked into private rental market that doesn't allow them to heat or cool their homes. So we need to go back to the core issue – if we provided everyone with a good roof over their head that was energy efficient and sufficient income, we wouldn't have a lot of these problems. And that goes all the way back to income support. We know it's at least \$75 a week short; that's why people aren't feeding themselves. So if we tackle those big structural issues, we wouldn't have the level of emergency that we actually have now, because it's not the four days of the heatwave, it's every day of the year that these people are under stress. So that would be my main driver. We've got to, ultimately, drive the structural issues that have people in entrenched poverty that puts them in this place. Would you add anything to that, Graham?  
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PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Look, that leads in nicely to my final question. And again, you started off by saying those who have contributed the least to the issue, in terms of climate change, are the most affected by it. And, you know, clearly the concept of fairness is intrinsic to your work at WACOSS. Can you therefore speak about the concept of climate justice and whether you find that helpful or relevant as a community services organisation?  
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[13:39:30]

5 MR HANSEN: Yes, we consider the concept of climate  
justice to be crucial. As you say, while we've already spoken about how  
climate change entrenches and exacerbates inequality and poverty, so think if  
that justice lens isn't applied, it's perfectly plausible that climate action can do  
10 just the same. We already see that to some extent when you consider the  
uptake of rooftop solar, an approach that's centred on individual household's  
capacity to address their own energy use. But not only doesn't it benefit people  
on low incomes, but it may also make life harder for them as they're hit by  
increases in energy costs as the system struggles to cope with the changing  
15 demand profile. So we consider that a poorly-made transition to a clean  
economy can hit those on the lowest incomes the hardest. And it's critical that  
regulators and policymakers work together to ensure an affordable, inclusive  
and equitable transition that supports the workers and the communities most  
affected. We consider the concept of climate justice to be essential in centring  
20 the needs and concerns of those communities that will be the most impacted, to  
ensure that we are providing them with the necessary support to transition.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Would you like to make a closing  
statement, Ms Giolitto?

25 MS GIOLITTO: No closing statement from me, thank you.

PROF WEERAMANTHRI: Can I thank you both for your attendance  
at today's hearing. A transcript of this hearing will be sent to you so that you  
can correct minor factual errors before it is placed on the public record. If you  
30 could please return the transcript within 10 working days of the date of the  
covering letter or email, otherwise it will be deemed to be correct. While you  
cannot amend your evidence, if you would like to explain particular points in  
more detail or present further information such as the reports you referred to,  
please provide this as an addition to your submission to the Inquiry when you  
35 return the transcript, and we can talk you through the process in a second.  
Once again, thank you very much for your evidence.

MS GIOLITTO: Thank you.

40 MR HANSEN: Thank you for the opportunity.

HEARING CONCLUDED