



Climate Health WA Inquiry

Health Support Services Submission

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1 The Climate Challenge

Climate change represents a momentous challenge for current and future generations which need to be addressed by society at large, including all levels of Government, the private sector, and the public. The consequences of climate change are far reaching and will have significant implications across all facets of Government and public service delivery, including our ability to deliver public health services.

Health Support Services (HSS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Climate Health WA Inquiry and working with the WA health system to address climate change risks and adapt to the changing environment.

HSS is progressing reforms to better position it to respond to the challenges associated with climate change, as well as other social and environmental concerns. This submission provides an overview of the impact of climate change on the WA health system, and identifies a range of mitigation and adaptation strategies for contemplation at varying levels.

Aside from initiatives relating to regular business activities, there are opportunities to address climate risks through a coordinated strategy across the WA health system as a whole. Many of the risks identified will be relevant across the health system, or will otherwise require cooperation with other organisations to effectively manage these risks, and as such would benefit from the adoption of a consistent approach.

The details of any strategy to be adopted across the WA health system will require broad stakeholder support and executive sponsorship across all Health Service Providers (HSPs). HSS looks forward to working with other HSPs to develop a strategy that receives uniform endorsement and will provide support to the WA health system in the implementation of an agreed approach, so as to ensure they can continue to deliver excellent health care.

2 Impact on the Health System

2.1 Overview

Climate change will affect the public health in a myriad of ways. There are direct and indirect environmental health determinants which influence the level of demand for healthcare services expected of the WA health system. Climate change also impacts on healthcare systems and infrastructure that challenge the capacity of the health system to maintain business continuity and similar risks are experienced by our suppliers and partner organisations.

Developing a comprehensive understanding of these effects is critical to informing the development of an effective strategy for the WA health system to adapt to a changing climate and to contribute toward risk mitigation efforts.

In developing a strategy to better prepare for climate change risks, it is important to recognise the long term challenges associated with the nature of climate change. Decisions regarding how climate change is addressed will have consequential implications for future generations. These intergenerational considerations need to be balanced against present day priorities.

While population health will be significantly affected, this submission focuses on the factors and impacts relevant to the operation of the health system, and the supporting function that HSS can provide in addressing climate change.

2.2 Population health

Population health is directly and materially affected by extreme climatic events. This impact can be attributable to both weather events (relating to short term changes atmospheric conditions), and changes in climate (relating to atmospheric conditions over a prolonged period within a specific area). The effects of climate change on population health needs to be considered in the context of frontline service delivery, as well as the supporting systems and infrastructure necessary to facilitate ongoing delivery of healthcare services. Aside from changes in the aggregate level of demand, the health system will also need an enhanced capacity to accommodate greater variability and changing patterns in demand for healthcare.

One of the anticipated consequences of climate change is an increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events (e.g. severe storms, heatwaves, and bushfires). This is likely to have health consequences for the broader community, and particularly vulnerable or at-risk populations; with corresponding impact on demand for healthcare services. The increased demand for healthcare services may be particularly pronounced in the event that extreme weather events occur in rapid succession or over an extended period (e.g. a heatwave that lasts for a week). Changing climate conditions may also have implications for disease transmission mechanisms.

Climate change will have secondary impacts on health as its effects are linked with environmental determinants of health – air quality, along with availability of food and water. While these can be more difficult to quantify, the outcomes can be clearly observed. For example, there are presently ten towns across Queensland and New South Wales which are experiencing extreme water scarcity, and are projected to reach ‘day zero’ (where their water supplies are exhausted) within the next six months if drought conditions continue. Such environmental conditions will have significant repercussions for the livelihoods of those towns, and are likely to affect mental health outcomes across the community.

2.3 Healthcare infrastructure

The effects of climate change on healthcare infrastructure should be considered, both with respect to infrastructure capacity to accommodate changing levels of demand for healthcare services, and its ability to operate in adverse weather and climate conditions.

Extreme weather events, such as severe storms, are associated with the risk of flash flooding, high winds, and flying debris. As the incidence and severity of such events increase, the vulnerability of healthcare infrastructure and their continuing ability to operate in the event of such risks eventuating will need to be assessed and adequately managed. These same risks will also need to be considered with respect to ancillary health infrastructure (e.g. the vulnerabilities of logistics facilities such as warehouses and storage rooms; utilities equipment and infrastructure for sites, and communications facilities).

Expansion of tropic zones will mean new areas are at risk of cyclonic events, while rising sea levels will mean risks of storm surge and coastal erosion may become more salient for coastal infrastructure. These same risks will also affect public infrastructure that healthcare services rely on to function (e.g. electrical systems, telecommunications, and transport systems).

These risks should be considered in the context of critical dependences and vulnerabilities relevant to business continuity for the delivery of healthcare services, so as to ensure they can be appropriately managed.

2.4 Supply Chains

The WA health system operates in conjunction with a range of other organisations, to deliver services to the public, including community organisations and suppliers. Just as climate change risks will affect the ability of the WA health system to deliver services, other organisations will similarly be affected, with implications for their ability to deliver products and services.

In the context of suppliers, the interconnected nature of the global supply chain means that climate change risks that eventuate in other parts of the world may result in local shortages or disruptions to the supply of products used by the WA health system.

Management of these risks will require the identification of key suppliers and partner organisations providing critical products and services, an understanding of the nature of supply chain risks, and a collaborative approach to risk management to assure continuity of supply. There are already a range of measures in place to ensure the WA health system is resilient and has the capacity to deal with known emergency situations, however there is always room for further planning and preparatory work to consider new and evolving emergency response strategies associated with extreme weather events.

2.5 Regulatory and Transition Risks

As the effects of climate change become more prominent, it is likely that public expectations of Government will increase, in terms of both adaptation effort, and political action to mitigate climate risks.

Efforts to address climate change risks should therefore be cognisant of the likelihood of regulatory change and actions that will be necessary to ensure compliance. It is likely the public will hold expectations that Government take action to address reasonably foreseeable risks, in order to assure continued service delivery, and to prepare the community at large for changing climate conditions.

As previously noted, changing climate conditions will result in unforeseen costs, including on the healthcare system in a myriad of ways - from increasing demand for healthcare services, to the cost of repairing damage from adverse events and resources expended to undertake initiatives to adapt to and mitigate climate change risks.

It is important to recognise there will be costs associated with preparing for climate change over different time horizons. Decisions regarding the allocation of resources to address present day service delivery priorities need to be balanced with the need to adapt to climate change, so as to future proof service delivery capacity. The actions of the WA health system need to meet public expectations both at present, and into the future.

3 Supporting a Climate Strategy

3.1 HSS Initiatives

HSS supports the Department of Health and HSPs in providing excellent health care. As part of this commitment, HSS will provide the WA health system with support in addressing climate change.

HSS is implementing reforms that will improve its responsiveness to the needs of the WA health system. These reforms include initiatives to:

- a) improve the data analytics;
- b) improve reporting capability;
- c) increase efficiency and reduce waste in inventory management; and
- d) more effectively engage with and manage contractors and supply chains.

These efforts to strengthen organisational capability will establish a foundation upon which further initiatives to address climate change can be progressed.

HSS can undertake steps to address climate change by introducing environmental priorities within existing reform initiatives, and expanding on environmental attributes where opportunities exist.

Immediate opportunities that may be explored include:

- a) evaluating supplier commitment to responsibly managing and reducing their environmental footprint where possible;
- b) building on existing waste management strategies to reduce waste and increase recycling where possible;
- c) prompt discussion with suppliers about climate risks and provoke thought around the extent to which supply chains may be vulnerable to disruption from climate risks; and
- d) preparing for the establishment of data monitoring and measurement of select organisational activities (e.g. volume of printing) to support efforts to reduce office waste and provide a tool for measuring outcomes.

3.2 Future Horizons

In the medium to long term, HSS can play a leading role in identifying and managing supply chain exposure to climate change risks, by developing a robust category management approach to engaging with suppliers that drives the collaborative identification and management of risks for critical products. This will be critical to understanding and managing the risk of disruption to the supply chain and associated products.

Aside from initiatives targeted at internal business activities, the role of HSS in providing support services to the WA health system means it's most significant opportunity for contribution is in supporting the development and implementation of system-wide strategies to address climate change.

Support for system-wide initiatives could be provided in the form of:

- a) data and reporting tracking activities or outputs (such as waste generated);
- b) reporting functionality to support monitoring and tracking of system environmental outcomes;
- c) data analysis, providing greater insight into underlying trends and business implications – whether for environmental outcomes, resource allocation or other relevant areas;
- d) identification of system-wide opportunities to reduce environmental footprint (whether from improved inventory management practices, to changing in packaging requirements, or comparative analysis of the costs of single-use and reusable products);

- e) policy amendments to the procurement policy framework that may mandate an environmental component for inclusion when undertaking procurements across the WA health system;
- f) practice guidance and leadership on better management of environmental risk and impact within contract portfolios and across supply chains (e.g. through the introduction of triple bottom line reporting, and more active engagement to increase the visibility of supply chain risks);
- g) guidance on procurement practice that provides direction on how climate change risks or other relevant topics may best be addressed and/or managed in the procurement context; and
- h) coordination of procurement related climate initiatives through existing forums managed by HSS.

The precise nature and details of any system-wide initiatives will be dependent on the direction of the Department of Health and the broader WA health system in developing and implementing a climate change strategy.

4 Climate Change Leadership

4.1 Climate Change Leadership

The development of a public policy position and coherent strategy for the WA health system to address climate change will require leadership from within the WA health system to develop a policy foundation, build stakeholder support and consensus, and coordinate the implementation of climate initiatives. This leadership role will be critical to guiding discussions around the potential compromises that any given policy position will entail, and for leading engagement with the public on climate change issues.

From a public health perspective, it is beneficial to engage in public discourse on climate change to raise awareness of public health implications of climate change, and ensure the community is adequately prepared.

Within other industry sectors, regulatory bodies have moved to assume this function – for example, within the financial services industry, both the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority and the Reserve Bank of Australia have taken steps to signal their expectations to industry around adequate evaluation of exposure to climate change risks, and encourage action to manage these risks.

There may be benefit in defining an equivalent role in monitoring risks to the sector from climate change and providing confirmation to the public these risks are being evaluated and mitigated to ensure service continuity.

4.2 System-wide Solutions

The nature of climate change is such that the WA health system as a whole will be affected, and many risk factors and solutions will need to be geographically appropriate, considering the workforce and infrastructure is distributed across three climatic zones in Western Australia. A coordinated whole of system approach will play an important role in achieving efficient and effective management of climate change risks across the health system. This will allow for standardised and comprehensive guidance to be provided on identification and management of risks; and enable individual HSPs to benefit from the insight and experience of other HSPs. The efficiencies gained from adopting a coherent

and coordinated strategy will be vital in minimising costs incurred in the process of managing climate risks.

A range of initiatives have been outlined below for consideration as potential approaches to address the effects of climate change on the WA health system. This submission seeks to highlight key ideas and conceptual solutions for addressing climate change issues, while noting that considerable flexibility exists in defining the final details for the implementation of any solution that is adopted. The capacity for flexibility will be important for accommodating differences between HSPs in their capacity, appetite and perspective with respect to any given initiative.

It should further be noted that many of the proposed solutions exhibit a degree of inter-dependence; and will be optimally beneficial if they are implemented as a complementary set of initiatives. Finally, an evaluation of system-wide solutions will need to consider an appropriate timeframe in which they might be implemented. The state of readiness across different HSPs will be a critical factor determining the success of any given initiative.

4.2.1 Recognising Climate Change in Organisation Risk Management Processes

Effective risk management is central to the efforts of addressing climate change risks. While climate change is uniquely significant in the scale of challenge it represents, it has similar characteristics, and can nonetheless be evaluated in the same manner as any other risk.

The recognition and evaluation of risks stemming from climate change as part of the risk management and business continuity planning process, for all HSPs, represents a step forward that could be undertaken across the WA health system. Doing so will ensure climate change risks are thoroughly evaluated in terms of exposure, risk appetite and decision making processes that normally apply to comparable risks with similar consequences.

It is important an evaluation of climate related risk considers the full extent of exposure. It may be the case that some aspects of climate change risk are already recognised on organisational risk registers for HSPs. However it would be beneficial at a system level to develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of the common areas of risk and vulnerability to climate change and ensure that this has been considered by all HSPs as part of their organisational risk management and business continuity planning.

For example, climate change impacts may affect the level of demand for healthcare services, in terms of the location, scale, and type of services required, with downstream implications for the healthcare infrastructure and facilities that will need to accommodate greater flexibility in service delivery to accommodate these impacts. Individual HSPs will need to consider these risks in the context of how their existing operations will be affected, and undertake forward planning to properly manage identified risks.

There is potential for tools and guidance to be provided to HSPs to assist in undertaking an assessment of vulnerability, and how common risks might best be managed. Further, a systemic approach to evaluating the sophistication of risk management plans and their effectiveness could be provided by undertaking stress tests or scenario planning in order to further evaluate the state of readiness of HSPs.

The identification and management of key risks, which include risks stemming from climate change, should ordinarily occur automatically in the normal course of organisational risk management. However this action has been explicitly identified for consideration in

recognition of the fact that in many instances, the normal process of risk management has not been applied to climate change risks.

“We wouldn’t get on a plane if there was a 5% chance of the plane crashing, but we’re treating the climate with that same level of risk in a very offhand, complacent way.”

Nick Robins, co-director, Inquiry into the Design of a Sustainable Financial System, United Nations Environment Programme

4.2.2 Metrics and Performance

One of the key themes articulated in the *Sustainable Health Review* is the importance of metrics and transparency in driving sustained changes. This will similarly be the case when seeking to address climate change risks. Individual HSPs can and should develop measures for monitoring the success of their climate adaptation initiatives.

“You cannot improve what you do not measure or fully understand. It needs to be clear from the outset what the WA health system seeks to change, with commitment to openly reporting progress.”

Sustainable Health Review, Final Report to the Western Australian Government

There is the potential in the medium term to consider establishing standard measures across all HSPs to monitor their environmental footprint. These measures should be linked to desired outcomes, and would provide insight into the environmental impact of climate mitigation initiatives which may be undertaken. The scope and details of what gets measured will influence the value that can be derived from subsequent monitoring and analysis.

A measure which could be considered in the longer term is monitoring of carbon emissions across the WA health system – this would provide the most direct measure of organisational impact on climate change. However, for any given metric, consideration would need to be given to the practical challenges of implementing accurate measures.

System measures to evaluate climate resilience and capacity for emergency management could also be developed to provide insight into the extent of progress in implementing measures to adapt to climate change risks. In turn, this can inform the process of ongoing forward planning.

It is important to recognise that the measurement of progress in terms of environmental outcomes will be valuable for evaluating the success and effectiveness of individual initiatives and as means of informing decisions around business planning and allocation of resources. To the extent that the metrics and data provide insight into environmental impact, they will provide the evidentiary basis for decision makers to consider the magnitude of those impacts as part of the planning and decision making process.

4.2.3 Internal Carbon Pricing

Internal carbon pricing is used with increasing prevalence by companies to mitigate climate-related risks, and reduce their carbon emissions. While several approaches to implementing internal carbon pricing exist, the fundamental idea is to recognise a financial cost for greenhouse gas emissions generated from business activities, and take account of that cost when undertaking organisational planning and making decisions.

This provides decision makers with a more accurate view of the true cost of an activity, and provides a mechanism for quantifying environmental impact in financial terms. This provides a valuable tool in more accurately evaluating climate related risks. Furthermore, it provides a clearer basis for evaluating the total merits and/or costs of a particular activity or decision, and thereby enables better decisions around resource allocation, and how greenhouse gas reduction can be achieved.

The option for implementing internal carbon pricing within the WA health system will be contingent on first establishing measures of carbon emissions. It should be noted that in the event a national carbon pricing scheme is established (whether through a tax, or an emissions trading scheme) the need for internal pricing will be avoided. Nonetheless, the adoption of an internal carbon price would represent a significant initiative in managing risk of regulatory change associated with climate change, and would allow for changes to be implemented in line with internal timeframes, instead of being driven as a reaction to external impetus.

4.2.4 Energy Generation, Management and Microgrids

The WA health system manages a significant portfolio of built infrastructure necessary to support the delivery of healthcare services across Western Australia. These facilities can have substantial energy requirements owing to the scale and nature of their operations in delivering services at all times. The challenges of climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts will be relevant to healthcare energy infrastructure planning.

In the first instance, consideration could be given to monitoring and understanding energy consumption patterns, identifying key factors driving demand across different sites, and pursuing opportunities to improve energy efficiency or otherwise reduce energy demand while meeting business needs.

In addition, ongoing reductions in the cost of distributed energy resources (e.g. solar panels, wind turbines and heat recovery steam generators) mean that opportunities to establish distributed energy generation within healthcare infrastructure should be explored. This has the potential to contribute toward increased energy sustainability and reducing energy costs, while also increasing the resilience of sites in the event of an electrical outage. These benefits could be further increased with the inclusion of energy storage systems that would provide further assurance of uninterrupted energy supply, and also allow for better management energy demand over time.

The introduction of distributed energy resources onto a given site, often accompanied by complementary initiatives (whether a battery system, energy management and optimisation or otherwise) allow for the establishment of microgrids that enable better control and distribution of power. It should be noted that the subject of microgrids and associated technologies is currently the subject of an Inquiry from the Parliament of Western Australia, exploring their potential, and opportunities to maximise economic opportunities associated with their development.

4.2.5 Transport

Transport represents another area where the environmental footprint of the WA health system might be examined for opportunities to reduce environmental impact. For example, the vehicle fleet might be reviewed with respect to fuel efficiency and emissions standards, so as to drive more environmentally conscious decision making as fleet vehicles are

replaced over time. As part of such an initiative, system-wide vehicle standards could be introduced to provide clear guidance on appropriate minimum standards.

There may also be opportunity to examine employee modes of transport to and from work, and as part of business activity; and identify measures to encourage greater adoption of more environmentally conscious forms of transport.

4.2.6 Environment and Sustainability in Contract Management

The WA health system manages a large portfolio of contracts as part of its normal procurement activity to support its business operations. With annual procurement expenditure exceeding \$2 billion, the WA health system is an important customer to its many industry players, and has the ability to influence industry to more actively address climate change issues.

Reform initiatives to support the development of procurement capability are currently under way. Once the procurement capability of the WA health system is sufficiently mature, it can seek to promote better awareness and management of environmental issues across its contract portfolio. This may include engagement with its suppliers to develop better visibility of supply chain risks and vulnerabilities and to implement appropriate strategies for managing those risks so as to enhance the resilience of supply chains.

A clearer understanding of environmental footprint and impact across the supply chain can also be developed at the same time. The introduction of performance indicators across the contract portfolio can be used to drive better environmental outcomes. At a system level, better engagement and management of contract portfolios to achieve these outcomes could be achieved through a combination of policy and practice changes, with appropriate training and supporting tools. For example, a balanced scorecard approach, or triple bottom line reporting could be incorporated into contracts to monitor contractor performance across a broader range of priorities.

The resulting performance scores could be monitored in aggregate at a portfolio level if standardised measures were introduced across the WA health system, and in turn provide an avenue to drive measurably improved outcomes. Given the scale of the WA health system's engagements with industry, its efforts to drive improvement in environmental outcomes will not only be relevant for its own measures, but may contribute to wider industry discourse around the management of environment footprint.

4.3 Transition Costs and Risks

It is important that planning for delivery of healthcare services takes account of costs that may be incurred, given they will consume a portion of the resources which would otherwise be available to the health system. This will be relevant to budget and resource allocation undertaken as part of the ongoing planning and management of healthcare services. A more sophisticated examination of costs may consider both the anticipated outcomes and costs of alternative courses of action.

Climate change will impose costs on the WA health system, no matter what course of action is taken. These costs may originate from any number of areas – from increases in demand for healthcare, or damage from extreme weather events, to costs that may be incurred in implementing climate risk mitigation strategies. Future planning for the delivery of healthcare services will need to account for these costs, as they will affect the availability of resources to support other healthcare priorities.

Complex decisions regarding opportunity costs will arise when undertaking initiatives to adapt to and / or mitigate climate change risks. The costs incurred when executing these initiatives involve the allocation of resources that could otherwise be dedicated to other areas of present-day service delivery. These costs should be considered in the context of future benefit resulting from the initiative. In effect, the pursuit of these initiatives represents a trade-off between service delivery capacity in the present and future.

It is important that opportunity costs, involving trade-offs, are clearly understood by decision makers as part of the ongoing business planning process for HSPs and the WA health system. When taking this broader perspective, there are no costless decisions. Rather, all decisions (whether to proceed with an initiative or not) represent a prioritisation of service delivery capacity at some point in time, with intergenerational consequences.

These decisions should further be informed by an understanding of the relative scale and consequence of potential outcomes from pursuing climate initiatives. That is, the quantum of costs incurred in the present may not be representative of the scale of future benefit.

4.4 Effective Communication

Effective communication will play a vital role in effectively addressing climate change. The implementation of any initiative to address climate change is likely to involve a wide array of stakeholders. The active support and involvement of these stakeholders will be influential in determining the success of any given initiative.

As part of the process of stakeholder engagement, whether to inform and educate the public on climate risks relevant to them, or to build support amongst internal staff, it is important to ensure that communications are appropriately tailored so as to deliver a message that is relevant, while also connecting with the specific audience.

4.5 Inter-agency Collaboration

The public will be impacted by climate change in ways that extend beyond the domain of delivering public health.

This submission has outlined a number of options that could be pursued to manage climate change risks, focusing on initiatives that are directly actionable by the WA health system. However, some risks will be largely outside the capacity of the WA health system to influence or control. For example, coastal health infrastructure may be at risk of flooding from storm surges; however it is unlikely that the health system would take the lead in constructing a storm wall to mitigate against such a risk. Rather, such an initiative would likely be undertaken by another Department with a view to protecting built infrastructure more broadly.

As part of its management of climate change risks, the WA health system should identify instances where climate risks are likely to be relevant to the portfolio of other agencies, and collaborate effectively to best manage these risks.

Agencies involved in constructing and managing healthcare infrastructure may need to consider the appropriateness of building standards as climate conditions change. Meanwhile, agencies responsible for public infrastructure may need to be engaged to ensure they have adequately considered risks around service continuity in extreme weather conditions, and that their disaster recovery plans have appropriately identified and prioritised restoration of services of critical healthcare infrastructure within defined timeframes.

Consideration should also be given to broader effects on the population and environmental determinants of health, and ensuring that the WA health system communicates population health consequences, and collaborates with other agencies to manage these effects.

4.6 Industry Partnership and Innovation

Climate change will cause major disruption to all sectors of the economy in the coming years. These disruptions can have complex effects that may affect the WA health system and the broader economy in unexpected ways. As these effects – whether anticipated or not – are felt, society will have to respond accordingly. This may take the form of actions in response to specific events, or changes in practice or business approach, to take account of evolving regulatory or business environmental factors.

Within such a dynamic environment, the WA health system will need a degree of organisational agility to operate effectively, and execute strategies and responses in a timely manner. As industry leaders innovate in how they manage their climate change mitigation and adaptation practices, the WA health system should work to ensure it has the organisational culture and capacity to work with industry and community partners, and provide leadership in shaping an effective climate strategy within the health sector.

This will require willingness on the part of WA health system leadership to seriously consider and pursue initiatives and opportunities for improvement as they arise, even in an environment where there will be competing demand for attention and resources to address immediate priorities. Achieving this will require some change to the culture of risk aversion that is often present across Government, and the establishment of decision pathways that balance strike a balance between the need for appropriate governance, oversight and stakeholder engagement, with the ability to trail innovative ideas or otherwise partner with industry to explore promising concepts.

As the broader environment in which the WA health system operates becomes more dynamic, the ability to adapt and respond effectively in a timely manner will become increasingly important to the continued successful provision of healthcare services to the WA public.

5 A Call to Action

The scale and effects of climate change on public health, health systems and infrastructure means the WA health system needs to take decisive action to continue providing excellent health care services now and into the future. The risks of climate change are such that they are no longer future concerns. Instead, the effects are material, and already being experienced across Australia.

This underlines the imperative for the WA health system to recognise and act on climate change concerns. In doing so, strong leadership will be needed to foster a broad base of support for action, coordinate climate strategy across the health system and guide complex decisions.

HSS recognises the scale of the challenge ahead and is ready to support HSPs and the broader WA health system in its approach to managing climate risks. In doing so, the public can be assured the WA health system will be positioned to continue delivering excellent health care now and in the future.

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