

- 4. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will reduce the contribution of WA health services to climate change and other detrimental impacts.
- 5. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will enable WA Health services to implement change, including energy efficiency, to a more sustainable model.
- 6. Evaluate the likely benefits (health and wellbeing, social and economic) arising from climate change mitigation strategies, with a focus on WA health services.
- 7. Define the role of the Department of Health in leading public policy on climate change and health.
- 8. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for undertaking a climate change vulnerability assessment for the health sector.
- 9. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for developing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the health sector.

Submissions response field

Please type your response to the item(s) selected above into the field below. Alternatively you may provide your submission as a separate attachment (suggested maximum 5 pages).

THE MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION

SUBMITS TO

CLIMATE HEALTH WA INQUIRY

Re: Term of Reference 3 - Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will strengthen the preparedness and resilience of communities and health services against extreme weather events, with a focus on the most vulnerable in the community.

The Mental Health Commission (MHC) recognises that climate change may have implications on the mental health of people in Western Australia (WA), including but not limited to:

- Immediate and long term effects such as stress and trauma post major disasters such as floods and fires;
- Long term mental health effects such as depression and anxiety, for drought effected farmers and communities that are significantly impacted; and
- The rise of “climate anxiety” particularly among young people.

The MHC also recognises that a strong sense of responsibility to the land is intrinsic to Australian Aboriginal culture, and therefore the impact climate change has on land, water and changes in seasons, may have significant implications on the mental

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health of Aboriginal people.

The MHC acknowledges that everyone has a part to play in managing the implications of climate change for health in WA, and that services provided by the MHC may contribute to strengthening the preparedness and resilience of communities and health services against extreme weather events.

The MHC's role as outlined in the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 (Plan) Update 2018 (Plan Update 2018), is to provide mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services to the small proportion of the Western Australian population who experience severe mental illness and/or AOD issues in hospital and specialised community-based services. In the case of mental health services, this includes the level of service required to meet 100 per cent of the needs of people with a severe mental illness. In the case of AOD services, this includes the level of service required to meet the needs of people with mild, moderate and severe AOD problems.

The MHC also provides mental health and AOD prevention and promotion services which aim to build resilience and support for people in distress (which could be as a result of climate change concerns). Current state-wide initiatives in the suicide prevention portfolio which aim to support people in distress include;

- Mental Health and Wellbeing Education for Men in Regional and Remote Farming Communities: A project which provides mental health and wellbeing education for men living in regional, rural and remote farming communities across Western Australia through the Regional Men's Health Initiative.
- Response to Suicide and Self Harm in Schools (Schools Response Program): A project which covers activities and outcomes related to the prevention, intervention, and postvention of suicide and self-harm in children and young people aged four to 18 years in schools.

Current AOD initiatives which aim to support people in distress and build resilience include;

- Strong Spirit Strong Mind: A project which aims to raise awareness of the harms associated with AOD issues among Aboriginal people, families and communities in the Perth metropolitan area.
- [Alcohol and Drug Support Line](#): A key support provided by the MHC for people who may resort to the harmful consumption of alcohol and/or other drugs due to climate change anxiety. The Alcohol and Drug Support Line is a 24 hours, 7 days a week confidential, non-judgemental telephone counselling, information and referral service for anyone seeking help for their own or another person's alcohol or drug use.

There are also 31 local prevention plans in place across the state which are community lead, and developed and supported by the MHC's community support and development programs team. These local prevention plans address local

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community concerns as identified by local data, evidence and community around mental health promotion, alcohol and other drugs and suicide prevention.

In addition to these services, the MHC has current representation on the Drought Senior Officers Group (SOG) which is convened by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. The Drought SOG monitors and reports on dry seasonal or drought conditions that adversely affect rural and regional communities and the corresponding effectiveness of social services in those regions.

As outlined in [Drought in Australia](#), other services which are available to help individuals, families, farms and rural and regional communities manage the long term mental health effects of drought include:

- Primary Health Networks
- Better Access telehealth
- Royal Flying Doctor Service mental health clinicians
- Head to Health
- reachOUT
- Lifeline
- MensLine Australia

The MHC looks forward to viewing the inquiry findings and recommendations which may assist in planning future priorities.

Please complete this sheet and submit with any attachments to: Climate Health WA Inquiry