

Climate Change

Transitioning to low carbon, low cost, healthy homes for all.

The global effects of climate change are increasingly being felt across Western Australia in the form of extreme heat, reduced rainfall, and bushfires.

Climate change is a social justice issue. We know that its impacts disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including those living in poor quality and overcrowded housing or who are experiencing homelessness.

Climate change is a health issue. We know that housing is a social determinant of health.¹ It is increasingly important that we ensure all homes are thermally comfortable and that our built environment protects against climate-related risks, including through the reducing sector emissions. Adaptation measures are also required community-wide to ensure vulnerable populations, including those experiencing homelessness, are safe during extreme weather events including heat waves.

Shelter WA is calling for fair, fast and inclusive measures to reduce emissions and protect against climate risk this decade.²

Australia's housing stock is inadequate for responding to these challenges, with the average energy efficiency rating of existing homes in Australia only 1.7 stars (out of 10) compared to new homes average of 6.1 stars.³

Of particular concern, recent research has shown that the country's regional and remote Aboriginal housing stock is *unable* to provide consistently healthy and comfortable indoor environments, and that state government programs are not factoring in climate change projections into the delivery, maintenance or management of this housing.⁴

Rapid decarbonisation of the built environment, including housing, is a critical step for keeping global warming under 1.5° and has crucial role to play in achieving the State Government target of net zero emissions by 2050 as set out in the *Western Australian Climate Policy*.

Energy efficiency retrofit programs targeting low income homes are widely considered to be a good economic investment that improves the health and wellbeing of residents while also delivering productivity benefits and creating local jobs.⁵

Shelter WA calls on the Commonwealth and WA State Government to urgently commit to, and invest in, a retrofit and replacement program to decarbonise WA's housing stock. Programs should prioritise low income households, including social homes, and focus on housing in the hottest and coldest climatic regions first.

Existing WA State Government initiatives including the Household Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) and the Smart Energy for Solar Housing pilot are positive, however more focus is required on structural improvements and thermal comfort (including insulation and reverse cycle air-conditioning upgrades) alongside behaviour change.

¹ World Health Organization. WHO housing and health guidelines. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018.

² The need for 'fair, fast, inclusive' climate action is a core demand of the Community Sector Climate Change Declaration, led by ACOSS, which Shelter WA was a signatory, 2021. See: <https://www.acoss.org.au/signed-community-sector-climate-change-declaration-2021/>

³ COAG Energy Council (2019) Report for Achieving Low Energy Existing Homes https://energyministers.gov.au/sites/prod.energycouncil/files/publications/documents/Trajectory%20Addendum%20-%20Report%20for%20Achieving%20Low%20Energy%20Existing%20Homes_1.pdf

⁴ Lea, T (2021) Sustainable Indigenous housing in regional and remote Australia. AHURI Final Report No.368.

⁵ Deloitte (2021, April), The economic impacts of the National Low-Income Energy Productivity Program, report Prepared for the Australian Council of Social Service.

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Lastly, it is critical that urban planning policy ensure all communities have access to active and public transport routes and have adequate shading and green space for urban cooling. New developments must maximise opportunities for solar passive home design through effective lot design.

Shelter WA recommendations:

- That the WA State Government introduce enhanced and transparent minimum standards for social housing, especially in relation to energy efficiency and thermal comfort.
- That the WA State Government develop and implement a plan to decarbonise the state's social housing assets this decade, including an energy audit for all existing stock, and urgent investment in a comprehensive energy efficiency retrofit/ replacement and solar installation program (focusing on thermal comfort and prioritising assets located in regions with extreme climates).
- That the WA State Government (with Commonwealth Government co-investment where possible) establish and invest in a rebate or grant program for low-income tenants and owners and community housing providers, to install energy efficiency upgrades, including draught proofing, shading, insulation, heat pumps for hot water, reverse cycle air-conditioning where suitable and solar panels (similar to the Victorian model).⁶
- That the WA State Government amend the *State Planning Strategy 2050* and *State Planning Policy 2* to incorporate the State Government's net zero by 2050 target, including carbon reduction benchmarks for all development, public and private.⁷ This should include a requirement for all-electric new homes.
- That the WA State Government introduce mandatory minimum energy efficiency standards for private rentals as part of the *Residential Tenancy Act 1987* (RTA) reforms.
- That the WA State Government introduce mandatory disclosure of home energy efficiency at point of sale or lease, in line with the *National Framework for Disclosure of Residential Energy Efficiency Information*.⁸
- That the WA State Government implement the updated energy efficiency standards in the 2022 NCC update in WA in a timely manner.
- That the WA State Government, in partnership with the housing and homelessness sectors, develop and implement an emergency response plan for rough sleepers during extreme weather, including storms, bushfires and heat waves.

⁶ <https://www.heatingupgrades.vic.gov.au/>

⁷ This is a recommendation by PIA.

⁸ The Framework was developed as part of Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings which is a national plan that aims to achieve zero energy and carbon-ready commercial and residential buildings in Australia. In February 2022, state energy ministers agreed to the Draft National Framework for Disclosure of Residential Energy Efficiency Information (the Framework). The Framework provides nationally harmonised settings for state and territory governments to implement their own disclosure schemes and supports a market environment that encourages disclosure in the residential sector. For further detail see: <https://www.energy.gov.au/government-priorities/buildings/residential-buildings#toc-anchor-trajectory-for-low-energy-buildings-residential-initiatives>