

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 it disproportionately impacts 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 reducing sector emissions. Adaptation measures are also required community-wide to ensure vulnerable populations, including those experiencing homelessness, are safe during extreme weather events such as heat waves.

Climate change is a housing issue. We know that it will affect housing demand as populations are compelled to move as the climate becomes increasingly unstable. This is already being seen in regional Western Australia through seasonal migration patterns.

Shelter WA supports ACOSS' call for fair, fast and inclusive climate change action, and its Blueprint Framework to achieve this.^[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]

[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. Shelter WA is also a signatory to the ACOSS Blueprint Framework (2024) See: <https://www.acoss.org.au/signed-community-sector-climate-change-declaration-2021/> and <https://www.fairfastclimateaction.org.au/resources>

[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

Currently much of WA's social housing stock is ageing, inefficient, and prohibitively expensive for tenants to keep at safe, comfortable temperatures. A recent survey found that almost 80 per cent of WA public housing tenants described difficulties keeping their property cool or warm.^[4] Similarly, a report by the Kimberley Community Legal Services (KCLS) described the unacceptable impacts of poor quality public housing in the Kimberley, including an inability to cope with extreme heat inside the house.^[5]

Rapid decarbonisation of the built environment, including housing, is a critical step for keeping global warming below 2.0° and has a 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* and proposed in its Climate Change Bill.

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 cost of living relief and developing workforce "green skills". Recent modelling by ACOSS found that 'quick fix' energy efficiency measures, electrification and rooftop solar could save low income Western Australian households an average of \$2865 a year.^[6]

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 target low income households, including social homes, and prioritise remote communities and regions where climate conditions are most extreme.

[4] Make Renting Fair Alliance (WA) survey responses from over 380 WA renters for the period June 2022 - October 2023, including public housing tenants.

[5] KCLS (2023) Stuck in Heat report.

<https://www.healthabitat.com/report-stuck-in-the-heat-lived-experiences-of-public-housing-tenants-in-the-kimberley/>

[6] See ACOSS (2024) analysis here: https://www.fairfastclimateaction.org.au/the_benefits_of_home_energy_upgrades

[7] This should include: **Bare minimum standards** that require homes to be weatherproof, draught proof, have adequate ventilation, curtains and flyscreens; and **Healthy homes standards** that set minimum insulation standards, climate appropriate heating and cooling for thermal comfort (ceiling fans and reverse cycle air conditioners for



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Existing WA State Government initiatives including the Energy Ahead program and the Smart Energy for Solar Housing trial (which is winding up in 2024) have been positive, however more focus is required on structural improvements and thermal comfort (including insulation and reverse cycle air-conditioning upgrades) alongside behaviour change. The WA State Government's reform of the Residential Tenancies Act, and the Commonwealth Government's work to harmonise minimum rental standards provide crucial opportunities to set clear, ambitious 'healthy homes' energy efficiency standards for rental homes.

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 set clear minimum rental standards under the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure all rental homes (including social housing) meet a set of 'bare minimum' standards, 'healthy homes' energy efficiency standards and accessibility standards that are progressively phased in.^[7]
- That the WA State Government invest in a statewide 'healthy homes' retrofit program for all social housing to improve thermal comfort, energy efficiency and the cost of living for tenants.^[8]
- That the WA State Government (with Commonwealth Government co-investment where possible) establish and invest in a program (including rebates, grant, subsidies or low interest loans) for energy efficiency upgrades, electrification and rooftop solar for private rental properties to complement 'healthy homes' standards and assist landlords to meet them.^[9]
- 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.^[10] This should include a requirement for all-electric new homes.
- 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*.^[11]
- That the WA State Government endorse and implement future updates to the NCC energy efficiency and accessibility standards in line with nationally agreed timelines.
- 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.

heating and cooling), energy and water efficient appliances and phase out of gas in homes. For more detail about proposed minimum standards please refer to Make Renting Fair's 'Out with the Mould: The Case for Minimum Standards in WA' report releasing in October 2024 at <https://makerentingfairwa.org.au/resources/reports/>

[8] This program should include additional measures like energy efficient water heaters and rooftop/community solar to further reduce emissions in social housing, and to better equip tenants for climate changes. In extreme climate zones such as the Kimberley, individual or community batteries should be included to maximise use of renewables to power air conditioners and reduce energy bills to help combat energy poverty.

[9] A rebate or grant program could draw on the Victorian Energy Upgrades (VEU) program. See: ACOSS 2024 analysis for the cost and benefits of 'quick fix' energy efficiency upgrades, electrification and rooftop solar here:

https://www.fairfastclimateaction.org.au/the_benefits_of_home_energy_upgrades.

[10] This is a recommendation by PIA.

[11] 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>