

# Climate change and human health: Exploring the role of systems thinking in local government action



## BACKGROUND

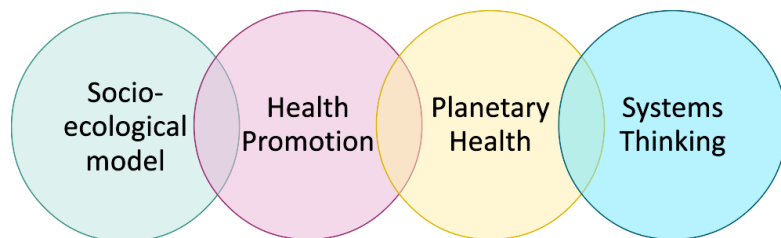
This poster looks at gaps in understanding the interplay of Victorian (Australia) government policy, climate, and health change efforts within local governments (LG) which is urgently needed to promote action for planetary health. Victoria, Australia has 79 LGs for which the current Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 requires four-yearly Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans (MPHWP) to improve the health of their local community. In 2017, the Victorian state government mandated climate change action be included in MPHWP's (Climate Change Act 2017).

## AIM

The research aims to explore how Victorian LG's are responding to the health impacts of climate change using a systems thinking approach.

## METHODS

The research used purposeful sampling to include all 79 current Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) across Victoria. A content analysis using a series of 13 yes/no question were used to identify climate change related health actions. In addition, the analysis explored the PH12 through qualitative research to determine if/and how systems thinking approaches are utilised within the MPHWP. The research has drawn on four theoretical approaches.



## FINDINGS

LGs utilise a range of environmental and health related actions to address climate change. Some LGs discussed the impacts of climate change but did not have a range of health initiatives within their listed objectives or strategies. More MPHWP's focused on the engagement of local community rather than empowerment or infrastructure approaches. The application of the PH12 found the MPHWP's sat on the lower level of the PH12 framework and lacked a systems thinking approach.

## INTERPRETATION

A fundamental shift is needed to foster and support systems thinking for more comprehensive, integrated, and dynamic frameworks for population approaches to health for all. Systems thinking is important because it provides a framework for understanding the intricate relationship and complexities of our planet's health and health of our communities.



## WHAT'S NEXT

The findings from phase one will provide a platform for understanding and describing how climate change impacts on health are being addressed within local government policy documents as well as identify if a systems thinking approach informed the plan. As this is an iterative qualitative research process, phase one inquiry will provide opportunity and flexibility to dive deeper and provide further explanations to inform phases two and three.

Nicole Bruges  
[nicole.bruges@deakin.edu.au](mailto:nicole.bruges@deakin.edu.au)  
Lecturer and PhD Student, Deakin University

### Acknowledgement of my Supervisors:

Dr Rebecca Patrick  
Dr Kristy Bolton  
Dr Claire Henderson-Wilson  
Professor Steven Allender