

Discussion topic 1:

Safe and resilient communities

Building community resilience to risks and threats like natural disasters and public health emergencies

Heatwaves, storms, fires and pandemics are among the emergencies that our communities have to plan for, respond to and recover from, requiring us to work together and reach out to the most vulnerable in our neighbourhoods.

Our community's key climate change concerns for our local area include:

- Harsher and longer fire seasons
- Extreme weather events
- More hot days, heatwaves and droughts

Frankston City Climate Change Survey 2021

In the six months from June to December 2021 there were two major storm events (June and October), during this time Council responded to over 2,400 calls for storm-related assistance.

Frankston City Council data

In 2021, Council's COVID-19 Recovery Call Centre responded to 4,351 calls for information and referral support.

Frankston City Council data

Between July 2020 and June 2021, Community Support Frankston provided material and financial support to 147 local families and individuals who weren't eligible for income support.

Frankston City Council data

Planning and preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies requires large scale coordination across multiple agencies, including all levels of government, emergency services, private organisations, volunteers and the community itself. This process is referred to as 'emergency planning' and involves collaborative planning between these agencies to agree how they are going to act before, during and after emergencies. Effective emergency planning can reduce the impact of emergencies and help protect against cascading consequences for individuals, communities and the environment¹.

'Community resilience' refers to the ways in which communities prepare for and respond to natural disasters and public health emergencies. The capacity of a community to do this is dependent upon having positive social connections and the ability of community members to draw together. The Victorian Community Resilience Framework for Emergency Management identifies that communities can better avoid or manage emergencies if they are connected, inclusive and empowered, have a dynamic and diverse local economy and a sustainable built and natural environment.

Natural disasters and public health emergencies can have a significant impact on the health and safety of our communities, as well as wide ranging social and economic flow-on effects, some of which may worsen risk factors for crime and unsafe behaviours. Furthermore, research shows that some people in our community experience greater impacts of natural disasters and public health emergencies, and have a higher risk of longstanding negative impacts. This can be a result of where we live, or social characteristics that increase our vulnerability due to inequity, including: age; gender; socio-economic status; people with disability and their carers; First Nations Australians; people from diverse cultural backgrounds; those experiencing homelessness; and LGBTQIA+ communities. For example, in Victoria and across the world, there has been a significant increase in reports of family violence impacting women since the COVID-19 pandemic began. In Frankston City, there was a 9.1% increase in family violence incidents associated with COVID-19 restrictions².

¹Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) 2020, Emergency Planning, AIDR, East Melbourne, Victoria.

²Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) 2021 Latest Crime Data by Area – Frankston, Crime Statistics Agency, Melbourne.

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO indicate a changing climate will increase the severity and frequency of many natural hazards in Australia, impacting the health and safety of our communities. For example:

- Heatwaves increase the risk of heat stress, dehydration, heat stroke and mortality and aggravate chronic conditions including chronic respiratory, cardiac and kidney conditions and psychiatric illness³.
- There was a 700% increase in ambulance callouts for cardiac arrest during the 2014 heatwave⁴.
- Flooding and storm water present risk of injury, loss of life, disruption to agriculture, impacts on food security and changes in the spread of infectious diseases⁵.
- More frequent, severe and widespread bushfires, increases the risks of burns, smoke inhalation, heat stress, dehydration, trauma and long-term mental health impacts⁶.

Council's role

Local government has an important role in emergency management, from prevention through to emergency response and recovery. For Frankston City Council, this role includes:

- Developing emergency management plans in partnership with other agencies and emergency services to agree on the arrangements for how, as a community, we can plan for, respond to and recover from emergencies.
- Prevention activities like actively inspecting properties prior to the fire season and working with fire agencies to reduce fire risks.
- Planning overlay controls to address risks to properties such as fire and flood.
- Provision and coordination of Council resources during the emergency response phase, including liaison staff to assist at the Incident Control Centre where required.
- Operating relief and recovery services and centres during and after an emergency – Council's Community Recovery Call Centre has been operating since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to link residents to support during emergency events and our family health services provide hot meals to our most vulnerable and to emergency services volunteers.
- Assisting the community with emergency preparedness, focusing on the welfare of our most vulnerable residents, supporting residents' ability to remain safe at home.
- Coordinating immediate relief needs via 'on call' arrangements, including emergency shelter for displaced people and animals after an event such as a house fire.
- Coordinating clean-up activities and assessing occupancy of damaged buildings and safety of sites after an emergency.

To perform this role, Council works closely with Victoria Police, Country Fire Authority, VicSES, the Australian Red Cross, Fire Rescue Victoria, Coast Guard, Department of Health, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and other local support and relief agencies.

The state and federal governments both have statutory responsibilities in emergency planning. State responsibilities include funding Emergency Management Victoria to lead emergency management in Victoria to strengthen the capacity of the emergency management sector and coordinate emergency preparedness, response and recovery. Federal responsibilities include developing and maintaining national health emergency response plans, activating the National Incident Room, maintaining the National Medical Stockpile and educating health professionals.

³Parise I 2018 'A brief review of global climate change and the public health consequences' *Australian Journal of General Practice* vol. 47, no. 7, pp. 451–56.

⁴Sustainability Victoria 2020 *Linking Climate Change and Health Impacts*, Sustainability Victoria, Melbourne.

⁵Department of Health 2019 *Climate Change and Health*, Department of Health, Victoria.

⁶Johnston FH 2009 'Bushfires and human health in a changing environment' *Australian Family Physician* vol. 38, no. 9, pp. 720–724, RACGP, Australia.