

# Submission to the National Health and Climate Strategy Consultation paper

July 2023

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## Table of Contents

<b>Summary of Recommendations</b> .....	3
<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>UNICEF lens: the climate crisis is a child rights crisis</b> .....	5
<b>Detailed Recommendations</b> .....	6
1.General advice on the consultation paper from a child rights lens.....	7
2.Child-sensitive adaptation.....	9
3.A child-sensitive Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach.....	13

## Summary of Recommendations

### **General advice on the consultation paper from a child rights lens:**

1. Commit to addressing the impacts of the climate crisis on children in the future by including intergenerational equity as a principle in the National Health and Climate Strategy
2. Prioritize population health over greening the health system by elevating 'Adaptation' and a 'Health in All Policies' approach as primary objectives within the National Health and Climate Strategy.
3. Elevate children's voices and priorities by ensuring that children, young people, and relevant academic experts have opportunities to meaningfully engage in the development, implementation and governance of the National Health and Climate Strategy.

### **Child-sensitive adaptation:**

4. Protect children by providing guidance to local, regional, and State and Territory authorities on child-sensitive adaptation in emergency response and recovery policies and procedures within the National Health and Climate Strategy.
5. Develop a plan to address the impending 'eco-anxiety' crisis in the face of the worsening impacts of climate change in Australia.
6. Strengthen children's psychosocial resilience in the face of the climate crisis by incorporating practical Climate Change Education (CCE) into ECEC, school, and tertiary education settings
7. Maximize the effectiveness of adaptation in the National Health and Climate Strategy by employing risk-informed approaches, context-specific policy interventions, and ensuring Australia's overarching National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is child-sensitive.

### **A child-sensitive Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach:**

8. Prevent additional harm to children by designing climate mitigation policy across sectors is sensitive to the health needs of children and young people.
9. Embed children's climate-related health needs in all economic, and social policy design, addressing child-critical social services, social protection, built environment planning, and whole-of-government policymaking processes.

## Introduction

UNICEF Australia commends the Australian Government for undertaking to develop a *National Health and Climate Strategy* (henceforth ‘the Strategy’) and welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Strategy Consultation Paper (henceforth ‘the consultation paper’).

The climate crisis is the defining global challenge of our time. Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) are higher now than at any time in the last two million years, and global warming has happened at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last two thousand years.<sup>1</sup> Australia’s climate has warmed by over 1 degree Celsius in the last century, with warming occurring in all months and both day and night-time average temperatures increasing.<sup>2</sup> The impacts of warming at this level are already highly disruptive and damaging to lives and livelihoods across the globe, particularly for children and young people who are uniquely vulnerable. Regardless of how rapidly the world decarbonizes, current emissions levels mean that some climate impacts are certain and irreversible.

This is therefore a once in a generation opportunity to ensure that Australia adequately addresses the current and future health impacts of climate change on people, the health system, and economic and social systems more generally. The National Health and Climate Strategy must be as ambitious, coherent, inclusive, and effective as possible.

UNICEF Australia’s overarching view is that the *National Health and Climate Strategy* should actively and explicitly address the health risks and impacts of climate change on children and young people<sup>3</sup> and include responses, policies, and practices that specifically address these risks and impacts. The voices and perspectives of children and young people should also be meaningfully included in the development of the strategy, its governance, and its implementation. The following sections explain why this perspective is fundamentally important to an effective strategy.

## UNICEF’s lens - the climate crisis is a child rights crisis

The climate crisis threatens children's rights under the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). Climate change threatens children’s rights to survival and development (Article 6), to health (Article 24), to an adequate standard of living (Article 27), to education (Article 28), and to recreation and play (Article 31). Indeed, the Climate Change Risk Index (CCRI), released by UNICEF in 2021,<sup>4</sup> notes that virtually all rights may be affected by the climate crisis, potentially impacting the effective implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) itself.<sup>5</sup>

Climate change affects access to food, drinking water and sanitation; affects physical and mental health; and worsens situations of chronic poverty, forced displacement, violence, and exploitation. Climate change also disrupts the key social service systems that children rely on, affecting access to early childhood care, education, healthcare, and secure livelihoods, which in turn affects long term health outcomes. Climate change is a risk multiplier, intersecting with other economic, social, and

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<sup>1</sup> Climate Council, “Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis”, August 2023, <[Microsoft Word - IPCC-6AR-WGI Explainer\\_updated.docx \(climatecouncil.org.au\)](#)>

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), State of the Climate 2022, Australian Government, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Note: ‘children’ includes anyone between the ages of 0 and 17, whereas ‘young people’ includes anyone between the ages of 18 and 25. The term ‘children’ is used on its own in particular parts of this submission, especially with regards to ‘children’s rights’ in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The rights of young people are equally important, although technically not included in the Convention’s remit. Among other variables, the health impacts of climate will vary by children and young people of different ages, and the Strategy should account for unique impacts on infants, younger children, teenagers, and young adults.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, “The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index (CCRI)”, 2021 <[The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index - UNICEF DATA](#)>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Pg. 111.

political crises to produce a range of cascading impacts on children and young people, affecting almost every dimension of their lives. Figure 1 highlights this web of intersections and impacts.<sup>6</sup>

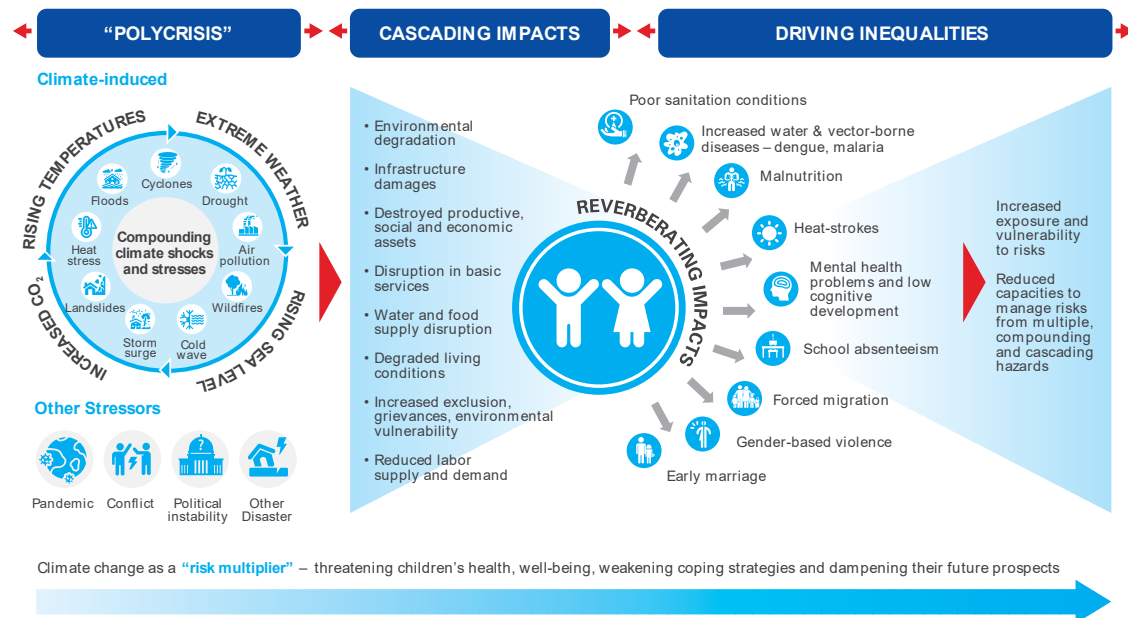


Figure 1: Climate change impacts on children Source: UNICEF EAPRO

The main reason that children and young people should be explicitly considered in the Strategy is that children are inherently more exposed and vulnerable than adults to the negative health outcomes of climate change outlined in the consultation paper.<sup>7</sup> This is because they are at the early stage of physiological and cognitive development and are therefore less equipped to deal with climate-related shocks and stresses.<sup>8</sup> For example:

- Children are more likely to be physically or psychologically harmed in a natural hazard than adults because their organs, muscles and brains are less developed;<sup>9</sup>
- Children are more vulnerable to temperature extremes, and the effects of shocks such as heatwaves than adults, as they are less able regulate body temperature;<sup>10</sup>
- Children are more likely to experience severe symptoms from vector-borne diseases and respiratory illnesses such as asthma;<sup>11</sup> More than 88% of diseases attributable to climate change occur in children younger than 5 years of age,<sup>12</sup> and multiple surveys show that 'eco-anxiety' predominantly affects children and young people.<sup>13</sup>

Climate change affects some children more than others. Children and families with lower incomes, lower levels of education and employment, and with poorer access to specialist health services in rural

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF East Asia Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), "Over The Tipping Point: How multiple, overlapping climate and environmental shocks and hazards on children in the East Asia and Pacific region are eroding their coping strategies, exacerbating inequality, and forever changing their futures", June 2023, <[Over the tipping point report.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#)>, Pg. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Health and Aged Care, "National Health and Climate Strategy Consultation Paper," June 2023, Pg. 24.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF EAPRO, Tipping Point, Pg. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Center for Disease Control (CDC), "How are children different from adults?" <[How are Children Different from Adults? | CDC](#)>



<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF EAPRO, Over The Tipping Point, Pg. 20

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF Office of Innocenti, "Report Card 17: Places and spaces – Environments and children's wellbeing", 2022, <[RC17-EN-Places-and-Spaces-Environments-and-childrens-well-being-Report-Card-17.pdf \(kc-usercontent.com\)](#)>, Pg 58.

and remote areas have fewer resources at hand. They lose more when facing climate shocks, hazards and stresses and face a longer and more complex road to recovery. Similarly, children who have experienced individualised or systemic persecution, deprivation, or neglect face significant additional challenges that place them at a disadvantage when it comes to coping or responding to climate change. Figure 2 highlights how climate change can exacerbate inequalities between children of different economic status.<sup>14</sup>

	EXPOSURE	VULNERABILITY	CAPACITY TO COPE
 <b>WEALTHY CHILD</b>	<b>Lower exposure due to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better infrastructure and safer living environments</li> <li>Tend to live in areas that are flood resistant with rigid infrastructure</li> <li>Access to a variety of sources of water, and means to improve the air quality within homes</li> </ul>	<b>Lower vulnerability due to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better access to healthcare and resources reduces vulnerability to climate-related risks</li> <li>Higher access to education, knowledge and information to reduce risks</li> </ul>	<b>Greater capacity to cope due to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater financial resources to recover from climate-related impacts.</li> <li>Access to funds or insurance to cover a quick retreat to safety – access to temporary accommodation, relocation</li> </ul>
<b>Lower exposure for wealthy child, higher exposure for poor child</b>		<b>Poor children are more vulnerable</b>	<b>Poor children have less capacities to cope and recover</b>
 <b>POOR CHILD</b>	<b>Higher exposure due to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substandard housing and living in hazard-prone areas</li> <li>Children tend to live and attend schools in high-risk areas</li> <li>Less access to water and air filtration, air conditioning, and other measures</li> </ul>	<b>Higher vulnerability due to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impact of extreme events can limit the ability of parents to afford to educate their children or require to work to meet basic needs</li> <li>Limits the ability of parents to provide responsive care giving from birth onwards</li> <li>A poor child who is already unhealthy or lacks adequate nutrition is more susceptible to air and water pollution, or climate-related impacts</li> <li>A poor child that cannot access education has less means to better protect themselves and communities from climate impacts</li> </ul>	<b>Reduced capacity to cope due to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inability to evacuate</li> <li>May not have reliable access to food, water, housing or energy, and insurance may be unavailable or unaffordable</li> <li>Reduced access to financial resources, social protection and insurance mechanisms</li> </ul>
	EXPOSURE	VULNERABILITY	CAPACITY TO COPE

**Widening inequality**

Figure 2: Climate change exacerbates pre-existing inequalities; Source: UNICEF EAPRO

Children and young people in Australia are both highly exposed and uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In the summer of 2019-2020 alone, two in five children and young people were personally affected by bushfires; three in ten children were personally impacted by drought; almost 25% were personally impacted by floods.<sup>15</sup> Given current greenhouse gas emissions trajectories, exposure to sudden and slow-onset climate disasters will grow. A 2022 UNICEF research report has found that, under current emissions trajectories, every child in Australia could be subject to more than 4.5 heatwaves a year, and up to 2.2 million Australian children could be living in areas where heatwaves will last longer than 4.7 days.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF EAPRO, Over The Tipping Point, Pg. 24.

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF Australia and Royal Far West, "After the Disaster: Recovery for Australia's Children," < [UNICEF Australia Publications](#)> Pg. 12.

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, The Coldest Year of the Rest of their Lives: Protecting Children from the Escalating Impacts of Heatwaves, <[UNICEF-coldest-year-heatwaves-and-children-EN.pdf](#)>, Pg. 34-44.

## General advice on the consultation paper from a child rights lens

### ***Intergenerational equity as a principle***

Children and young people are least responsible for climate change and are most affected by its impacts now and into the future. This is both an ethical issue and a reality with practical consequences for the futures of individuals, communities, and states. How we act to minimize the impacts of climate change on children’s health and wellbeing today will help determine the future our children and grandchildren inherit, and will also have significant consequences for social, economic, and political outcomes in the long run.

Enshrining and embedding the principle of intergenerational equity in climate policy is key a focus of child and youth climate advocates. The principle is included in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s *General Comment 26 on Children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change*, to be launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2023.<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, intergenerational equity should be a key principle underpinning all new climate change laws, strategies, policies, and investments in Australia, including this Strategy. Including this principle in the Strategy should give rise to objectives, goals, and actions that plan for short, medium, *and* long-term impacts, including by considering the implications of climate change that may not manifest for decades.<sup>18</sup>

### **Recommendation 1: Include intergenerational equity as a principle in the National Health and Climate Strategy**

#### ***Vision, purpose, and a hierarchy of objectives***

The Strategy should contain an underlying vision statement from which its purpose, objectives, goals, and actions should flow. UNICEF Australia supports the call for a vision encompassing a climate resilient community and a net zero healthcare system, in that order.

The purpose of Strategy as described in the consultation paper is to “protect the health and wellbeing of Australians from the impacts of climate change.”<sup>19</sup> This purpose necessitates that the Strategy prioritizes a whole-of-government approach to addressing the health impacts of climate change on the population now and into the future, and systemically builds community resilience in response to these impacts.

In this regard, UNICEF Australia welcomes the inclusion of the standalone ‘Health in All Policies (HiAP) and ‘Adaptation’ objectives in the consultation paper and supports their prioritization. From UNICEF Australia’s perspective, both objectives should explicitly address the unique needs of children and young people. This submission will address child-sensitive adaptation and HiAP approaches in more detail in following sections.

Whereas mitigating health sector emissions and measuring them are both important to Australia’s net zero future and should remain key elements of this Strategy, the most significant contribution this Strategy can make is to outline the ways in which people in Australia can be protected and prepared for the health impacts of a climate-affected world.

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<sup>17</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Children, “General Comment 26: Children’s Rights and the Environment with a special focus on Climate Change,” < [Global Community Second Consultation | General Comment No. 26 on Children’s Rights and the Environment \(childrightsenvironment.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/article/43c92094.html)>

<sup>18</sup> Draft General Comment 26, Pg. 4

<sup>19</sup> National Health and Climate Strategy Consultation, Pg. 4

**Recommendation 2: Prioritize 'Adaptation' and a 'Health in All Policies' approach as primary objectives within the National Health and Climate Strategy.**

***Co-design, and participation***

UNICEF Australia welcomes the commitment to ensuring that First Nations knowledge and experience is central to decision-making on climate and health policy. This commitment should be reflected in the co-design of the Strategy itself. The Government should prioritize the advice of First Nations elders and community leaders on the most culturally appropriate and effective ways to co-design the Strategy, incorporating ways to seek input from First Nations children and young people.

More broadly, the design and implementation of the Strategy should be as inclusive as possible. It should be informed by the perspectives of a diverse representation of the Australian population, including a diverse cohort of children, young people, and youth-led organizations.

In parallel, the Strategy should be informed by the perspectives of the widest array of experts possible, including experts in child rights, pediatric medicine, youth work, and child-focused disaster response and recovery. The Government should work with expert organizations such as UNICEF Australia to organize meaningful consultations with children, young people, and relevant experts.

***Governance and implementation***

UNICEF Australia supports the creation of key governance mechanisms outlined in the consultation paper, namely:

- A National Committee on Health and Climate Change led by the Commonwealth Ministers for Health and the Department of Health and Aged. The Committee would be comprised of experts in relevant areas of health, climate science and policy, Commonwealth and State and Territory ministers for climate change, environment, health, and energy, and be responsible for the Government's overseeing the design of the Strategy, setting policy priorities within the Strategy's remit, and providing final approval of key policies and programs.
- An independent, cross-sectoral, representative Board to advise the relevant Government Ministers on the Strategy and its implementation and produce an overarching annual report on implementation progress. Such a Board should include at least one child or youth advocate, and at least one organizational representative specializing in the health impacts of climate change on children and young people.
- The creation of an interdepartmental committee on climate change and health to progress action on specific thematic areas of the Strategy. In the absence of a Federal Minister for Children and a department with exclusive responsibility for children's issues, the committee should include departmental representatives working on policy areas at the intersection of climate change and health impacts on children, including early childhood education and care (ECEC), child protection, social services, physical and mental health, education, skills and employment. The committee should also include representatives from the Federal Government's Office Of Youth.

**Recommendation 3: Ensure that children, young people, and relevant academic experts have opportunities to meaningfully engage in the development, implementation and governance of the National Health and Climate Strategy**



### ***Goals, targets, timeframes and measurement***

The Strategy should identify specific goals, and targets under each objective, and include short, medium, and long-term timeframes to evaluate progress beyond electoral cycles. The Strategy should go beyond measuring health system greenhouse gas emissions, and include detailed metrics related to adaptation, and HiAP.

### ***Terminology***

The Strategy should include a glossary of definitions so that the community can understand the intention and parameters of objectives, goals, targets, and measurement. Terms such as health system, mitigation, and adaptation should be clearly defined in the broadest and most inclusive terms possible, in line with the One Health guiding principle and a HiAP approach.

### **Child-sensitive adaptation**

UNICEF Australia welcomes the inclusion of 'Adaptation' as a proposed objective in the consultation paper. This standalone focus acknowledges the fact that climate change is affecting people in Australia today and that there is urgent need to address a range of negative health outcomes associated with climate change in the present.

This objective must include consideration and coverage of child-sensitive adaptation. In 2022, UNICEF developed four criteria for determining child-sensitivity in climate policies, which can be applied to adaptation planning, and the health sector.<sup>20</sup> These criteria are:

- **Holistic and multisectoral:** addresses specific risks and vulnerabilities of children and young people by including commitments in child-critical sectors such as WASH, nutrition, and healthcare.
- **References:** includes explicit and meaningful references to children and young people, including those who are disadvantaged and marginalized.
- **Rights-based:** considers children and young people as rights holders and includes meaningful references to children's rights or intergenerational equity.
- **Inclusive:** identifies inclusiveness and the recognition of children and young people as important stakeholders for climate action.

### ***Child-sensitive emergency response, and recovery***

UNICEF Australia welcomes mention of "robust plans and procedures for preparedness, response, and recovery in relation to climate-related disasters and extreme weather events" in the consultation paper.<sup>21</sup> These plans and procedures should be child-sensitive across each phase of the emergency.

In the emergency response phase, this includes a focus on early intervention mechanisms to identify and address emerging physical and mental health issues that can cascade into serious illnesses over time, and in turn affect life trajectories and outcomes well into adulthood. These mechanisms can include:

- Provision of appropriate child and youth-friendly spaces in all evacuation and relief centers or online so that children and young people can share feelings and experiences, build peer-to-peer connections, and obtain referrals to specialist health or psychosocial services. Child-friendly spaces should be managed by skilled, specialist agencies, ideally with links to Primary

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<sup>20</sup> [Making Climate and Environment Policies for and with Children and Young People | UNICEF](#)

<sup>21</sup> National Health and Climate Strategy Consultation paper, Pg. 26

Health Networks (PHN), and local youth services. Child-friendly spaces in these settings act as early intervention points and can be useful in helping triage, manage, or prevent long-term physical and mental health issues early.<sup>22</sup>

- Enabling emergency response agencies such as the State Emergency Services (SES), the police, and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to consider and respond to the specific needs of children and young people in their approaches and practices. This can be accomplished via the designation of Children’s Safety Focal Points for State Emergency Management Committees (SEMCs) and lead agencies who can be responsible for collating information from personnel on the ground, identifying complex, emerging children’s health issues, coordinating with community leaders and specialist agencies, and making referrals as required. Governments should also resource agencies to adequately resource and train the Focal Points and frontline personnel on how to engage with children and young people in emergency response contexts. A well resourced and structured child protection response of this nature can also triage, address, or prevent long-term adverse health and wellbeing outcomes.

In the recovery and resilience-building phases of an emergency, Federal and State and Territory Governments should prioritise interventions that will improve the long-term health and wellbeing of children and their families affected by disasters as a priority. These include:

- Embedding child and youth-focussed health needs assessments into recovery and resilience-building planning. UNICEF Australia employed a version of its global emergency needs assessment methodology in the aftermath of the 2022 Northern NSW and Southeast Queensland floods, helping to identify the short and long-term psychosocial, and physical health needs of children and young people affected in those communities.<sup>23</sup> The assessment has formed the basis for multiple tailored health interventions in the aftermath of the floods in the region.
- Existing services and service gaps should be identified across the key health domains of need and wellbeing for children and young people, and funding should be available for long-term interventions (5-10 years) tailored to the needs of specific communities, and ideally, in collaboration with local community services. Initiatives such as Royal Far West’s Community Recovery Program, providing multi-disciplinary wraparound healthcare model of supporting children, parents, care givers and communities, is a key example of the kind of intervention that could be funded, assessed, and expanded,<sup>24</sup> especially in hazard-prone communities. Governments should be prepared to significantly scale-up investments in these initiatives across the country as the frequency and intensity of climate-related shocks, and hazards.

Climate-related emergencies go beyond sudden onset shocks and hazards, encompassing heatwaves, droughts, and other slow onset hazards. Heatwaves have had particularly significant impacts on Australian populations in recent times. Heatwaves kill more Australians than any other natural hazard, including bushfires, storms, tropical cyclones and floods combined.<sup>25</sup> Heatwaves also result in increases in call-cause mortality rates, emergency department presentations, and ambulance callouts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mary O’Kane and Michael Fuller, “2022 NSW Flood Inquiry,” <[2022 NSW Flood Inquiry | NSW Government](#)> Pg. 208.

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF Australia, “2022 Flood Response and Recovery Needs Assessment,” <[UNICEF Australia Publications](#)>

<sup>24</sup> Curtin et al, “Royal Far West Bushfire Recovery Program Evaluation, <[Royal Far West Bushfire Recovery Program evaluation — Charles Sturt University Research Output \(csu.edu.au\)](#)>

<sup>25</sup> Adapt NSW, “Climate change impacts on heatwaves”, <[Climate change impacts on heatwaves | AdaptNSW](#)>

<sup>26</sup> Lesley Hughes, “Climate change and the health impacts of extreme heat,” Climate Council <[The Silent Killer: Climate Change and the Health Impacts of Extreme Heat | Climate Council](#)>

UNICEF's most recent technical note on protection children from heat stress recommends a range of adaptation measures,<sup>27</sup> including:

- Knowing the facts about vulnerability and impact of exposure for pregnant women, infants, and children;
- Introducing a B.E.A.T the Heat risk communication framework across community settings relevant to children, including ECEC centres and primary schools;
- Adapting emergency room processes and procedures for diagnosis and case management flows;
- Promoting multisectoral national heat stress response plans and action plans at local or state levels;

Embedding child-sensitivity in climate-related emergency response and recovery planning requires consultation, knowledge sharing and investment at the local, regional and State and Territory governance levels where response and recovery plans, coordination, training, and resourcing is determined.

**Recommendation 4: Include specific guidance to local, regional, and State and Territory authorities on child-sensitive adaptation in climate-related emergency response and recovery policies and procedures, including slow-onset hazards such as heatwaves within the National Health and Climate Strategy.**

#### ***Adapting the mental health support to respond to children's needs in the climate crisis***

UNICEF Australia welcomes references to mental and psychosocial health, including climate anxiety, PTSD, and reduced opportunities for First Nations communities to access and connect with country, as key negative health impacts of climate change in the consultation paper.<sup>28</sup> That said, consideration of mental health is conspicuously absent in the discussion on what needs to be done to adapt the health system.

Climate change affects the mental health of children and young people in several ways, each requiring specific attention. Here we seek to highlight 'eco-anxiety' which affects significant numbers of children and young people in Australia. Eco-anxiety is a term used to describe heightened mental, emotional, and somatic distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system.<sup>29</sup> Eco-anxiety is a response to the helplessness and despair felt in the face of an inevitably existential crisis, creating feelings of stress, worry and frustration about the effects of climate change, and the inadequacy of our collective response to the crisis.<sup>30</sup>

The Strategy should consider the impacts of climate change on the mental health of children and young people, but also include specific guidance to address eco-anxiety. Important investments include commissioning research to understand the scale and impacts of eco-anxiety on children and young people; identifying and funding best practice programs aimed at children and young people and their parents/carers; embedding eco-anxiety within workforce professional development and training in the psychological sciences and social work; and supporting climate change education programs in early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres and schools.

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<sup>27</sup> UNICEF, "Protecting children from heat stress: A technical note," <[Protecting-children-from-heat-stress-A-technical-note-2023.pdf](#) (unicef.org)>

<sup>28</sup> National Health and Climate Change Strategy Consultation paper, Pg. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Maria Ojala, "Eco-Anxiety", *RSA Journal*, 164:4 (5576), 2018-2019;

<sup>30</sup> Headspace, "Supporting young people experiencing anxiety about climate change," <[Supporting young people experiencing anxiety about climate change | headspace](#)>

**Recommendation 5: Develop a plan to address eco-anxiety in Australia, incorporating a review to understand the extent of the issue, existing research and interventions, and community views on how to effectively address the issue.**

### ***Education and skills***

Effective climate change education (CCE) is both an important antidote to eco-anxiety and a necessary investment in strengthening the long-term resilience of children and young people in the climate crisis. Practical investments in age-appropriate climate change education (CCE), both within ECEC centres, schools and in extracurricular settings. Teaching green skills, emotional and psychosocial resilience-building activities, and basic emergency preparedness skills can significantly reduce the impact a climate shock or hazard has on a child. Effective CCE also teaches children and young people about the science, impacts, governance, and ideal responses to the climate crisis. CCE as a whole enables children and young people to be part of the solution, influence household and community behaviour and potentially drive action at scale.

Effective CCE goes beyond the ECEC or school setting. Universities and vocational education institutions have an important role to play in ensuring that young people are both climate literate and have the skills to take up jobs of the future. The National Job and Skills Summit produced important proposals in the latter regard, including to accelerate the delivery of additional fee-free TAFE places, to task Job and Skills Australia with commissioning a workforce capacity study on the clean energy workforce, and to implement cross-jurisdictional energy transition workforce planning.<sup>31</sup> Such a long-term approach to climate literacy, and skills training with have direct and indirect health benefits over time.

**Recommendation 6: Provide guidance on how to embed Climate Change Education (CCE) within ECEC, school, and tertiary education settings, as a key tool in building children’s resilience to the mental health impacts of climate change.**

### ***Risk and Adaptation planning***

UNICEF Australia welcomes focus on climate risk assessment and adaptation planning in the consultation paper.<sup>32</sup> Adaptation policy cannot be successful without a coherent understanding of climate risks and planning needs at national, regional, and local levels. Including children and young people in risk assessment and adaptation planning is crucial and can be done in several ways.

- ***The Children’s Climate Risk Index (CCRI):*** The Federal Government’s investment in a National Climate Risk Assessment (NCRA) is an important strengthening climate adaptation and resilience in Australia. In order to integrate child-sensitivity into the forthcoming NCRA, the Department could either incorporate elements of the Children’s Climate Risk Index (CCRI) into its assessment or create a standalone national CCRI. For background, in 2021, UNICEF developed a global CCRI. It provided the first comprehensive overview of children’s exposure and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, and ranked countries based on children’s exposure to climate and environmental shocks such as floods and heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks, based on baseline resilience and access to essential services.<sup>33</sup> In 2021, UNICEF and USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) launched a partnership to develop a CCRI-Disaster Risk Model (CCRI-DRM).<sup>34</sup> The CCRI-DRM builds on the

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<sup>31</sup> Commonwealth Department of Treasury, “Job and Skills Summit Outcomes” <[Jobs and Skills Summit September 2022 – Outcomes \(treasury.gov.au\)](https://www.treasury.gov.au)> Pgs. 2 – 13.

<sup>32</sup> National Health and Climate Consultation paper, Pg. 27.

<sup>33</sup> UNICEF CCRI 2021.

<sup>34</sup> UNICEF, “Children’s Climate Risk Index-Disaster Risk Model (CCRI-DRM) subnational assessment initiative, <[The CLAC PACK \(unicef.org\)](https://www.unicef.org)>

framework and method of the global CCRI to build country-specific subnational risk assessment models and an interactive geospatial platform to depict exposure and vulnerability to multiple hazards, shocks, and stresses. Measurement of vulnerability also incorporates economic, political, and social characteristics that reflect readiness to withstand the impacts of these hazards, shocks, and stresses.<sup>35</sup>

- ***A place-based approach to risk and adaptation planning:*** The Federal Government has identified addressing entrenched place-based disadvantage as a policy priority. This commitment is reflected federal budget allocations to the Stronger Places, Stronger People initiative, a place-based Outcomes Fund, and a whole-of-government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage. The Strategy should outline a plan to integrate the health impacts of climate change into frameworks, measurements, and assessments of place-based entrenched disadvantage in Australia, to enable tailored, effective long-run adaptation plans and investments in these communities.
- ***A child-sensitive National Adaptation Plan (NAP):*** UNICEF Australia welcomes the Federal Government’s commitment to a new NAP. The NAP should systematically consider the health impacts of climate change on children and young people and include detailed guidance on how to address children’s needs within health system resilience-building, and in the areas outlined above, in line with UNICEF’s criteria for child sensitive analysis.

**Recommendation 7: Maximize the effectiveness of child-sensitive adaptation in the National Health and Climate Strategy by employing risk-informed approaches, context-specific policy interventions, and ensuring Australia’s overarching National Adaptation Plan (NAP) considers children’s health needs.**

### **A child-sensitive Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach**

UNICEF Australia welcomes the inclusion of a standalone HiAP Proposed Objective in the consultation paper, noting that it should be prioritized in the Strategy, as a means of protecting the community from the health impacts of climate change. The Strategy should integrate child-sensitivity within the HiAP objective. There are two dimensions to this.

#### ***Designing climate mitigation policy to account for children’s health outcomes***

The mitigation of carbon emissions within the health sector and beyond is an existential imperative. It also has population health benefits, including for children and young people. Employing a health lens in climate mitigation policy could have significant impacts on its design.

To provide a short example of how a child-sensitive health lens can alter mitigation policy design, let’s consider air pollution in the UK. A 2018 UNICEF UK study on the impacts of air pollution on children made several startling health-related findings, including that one in three infants, and 4.5 million children under eighteen are growing up in areas of the UK with unsafe levels of particulate matter.<sup>36</sup> The study also found that the health effects from PM2.5 exposure cost the National Health Service (NHS) and social care services over 40 million pounds each year.<sup>37</sup> The study concluded that the Government had not yet prioritized interventions to protect children’s health; that national efforts to

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> UNICEF UK, “A Breath of Toxic Air: UK Children in Danger,” <[Microsoft Word - A breath of toxic air - Unicef UK research paper - June 2018.docx](#)>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

tackle air pollution had focused on lowering vehicle emissions to reach legal limits rather reverse or alleviate the negative health impacts of air pollution on children.<sup>38</sup>

The study highlighted that adopting a children's health lens to air pollution policy actually required higher ambition, and a wider array of policies to be considered successful, including creating clean air zones, and child-friendly urban areas promoting walking cycling and public transport.<sup>39</sup>

In order to successfully embed a HiAP approach in climate mitigation policy, the Government should:

- Quantify the economic costs of climate change under current emissions reduction scenarios coupled with modelling of the economic savings associated with the health benefits of emissions reductions across sectors at different levels of ambition; This would give us a collective understanding of just how valuable a child sensitive HiAP approach to mitigation policy is to Australia's economic present and future.
- Prioritize research and help build institutional capacity with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment, and Water (DCCEEW) to identify, develop and test the feasibility and effectiveness of emissions reduction policies that benefit health outcomes, including those for children and young people.
- Ensure that Australia's NDC considers climate-health risks and opportunities for health co-benefits from climate mitigation policies, including for children and young people.

**Recommendation 8: Provide guidance on a multisectoral plan to ensure that climate mitigation policy is sensitive to the health needs of children and young people.**

#### ***Accounting for children's climate-related health needs in economic and social policy***

We know that climate change impacts the wider social determinants of health, including ECEC, education, and housing. These impacts will worsen as climate-related shocks and hazards become more frequent and intense in coming years and decades. A systemic approach to protecting children from the negative health impacts of the climate crisis in the long run requires a whole-of-government, multi-sectoral commitment to addressing children's needs within economic and social policy, particularly in areas relevant to the social determinants of children's health. There are four kinds of interventions that should be prioritized in this regard:

- Ensuring minimum disruption to accessing child-critical social services such as ECEC, education, mental health and WASH in climate-related emergencies today and into the future.
  - This would include, for example, exploring design, planning, and investment into temporary education model that can be rolled out in emergency contexts to minimize lost learning during and after climate-related shocks and hazards.
- Ensuring child-sensitive social protection systems and policies are adequate to account for more frequent and severe climate-related hazards, shocks, and stresses in the future.
  - This would include, for example, a comprehensive national review of income support and Medicare system in line with projected need under varied future emissions scenarios and their predicted impacts on determinants of health such as housing, livelihoods, physical and mental health, and child protection.
- Providing guidance for industry, State and Territory (S & T), and local government authorities to incorporate children's climate-related health needs into built environment planning,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

including construction and building codes, urban planning and design of public places, transport policy, housing, food security and agricultural policy.

- This would include, for example, research and investment into refurbishing public playgrounds to ensure maximum resistance to heatwaves and the heat sink effect in urban areas.
- Incorporating children’s climate resilience into whole-of-government policymaking processes including the Early Years Strategy, the Investment Dialogue for Children, and the Measuring What Matters Framework.
  - The Measuring What Matters Statement includes building climate resilience as an objective and recognizes the forthcoming National Climate Risk Assessment and the National Adaptation Plan as key instruments for measuring and assessing progress on climate resilience.<sup>40</sup> This is a positive example of a whole-of-government activity to strengthen resilience, however, it’s effectiveness from a child-sensitivity lens will depend on the extent to which children’s health needs are considered.

UNICEF Australia welcomes acknowledgement of ‘One Health’ in conjunction with HiAP approach. Identifying and documenting the overlaps between One Health and HiAP will clarify policy areas related to environment, biodiversity, animal health and more that should be included in a HiAP approach to this strategy. The proposed establishment of an Australian Center for Disease Control (ACDC) in line with the One Health guiding principle is welcome. However, in the context of climate impacts on population health, the One Health principle must not be limited to preventing and responding to pathogens and disease outbreaks.

**Recommendation 9: Provide guidance on a process and plan for multisectoral approach to incorporating children’s climate-related health needs in economic, and social policy design, addressing child-critical social services, social protection, built environment planning, and whole-of-government policymaking processes.**

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<sup>40</sup> Australian Government, “Measuring What Matters: Australia’s First Wellbeing Framework,” <[Measuring What Matters \(treasury.gov.au\)](https://www.treasury.gov.au/Measuring-What-Matters)>  
Pg. 53