

17 April 2025

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Climate Action
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
PO Box 500
East Melbourne VIC 8002

Emailed to climate.change@deeca.vic.gov.au.

Dear Minister D'Ambrosio,

APS Response to Victoria's 2026-30 Climate Change Strategy

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is pleased to provide a response to Victoria's 2026-30 Climate Change Strategy (*the Strategy*). We appreciate you accepting our submission after the closing date as we have only been recently made aware of the opportunity to highlight the relationship between climate change and mental health and wellbeing. The impacts of climate change are a particular interest of the APS, as detailed in our Position Statement: *Psychology and Climate Change*¹. In addition, psychologists are experts in human behaviour and use evidence-based psychological interventions relevant to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, the effects of climate change.

As with all our work at the APS, we consider this in light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)². Undoubtedly, of particular relevance is SDG 13 which aims to "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts"³ but this work also critically interacts with SDG 3 which aims to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"⁴.

The APS has an established history of working collaboratively with the Federal, State and Territory Governments and other agencies to help address major social, emotional and health issues for local communities and ensure healthcare is equitable and accessible to all.

We look forward to working collaboratively with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action as *the Strategy* is developed and implemented to ensure that it is immediately impactful. In our response below, we have outlined some of the important challenges and opportunities to consider.

If any further information is required from the APS, I would be happy to be contacted through my office on (03) 8662 3300 or by email at z.burgess@psychology.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Zena Burgess, FAPS FAICD
Chief Executive Officer

APS Response to Victoria's 2026-30 Climate Change Strategy

The APS commends the Victorian Government on its early commitment to reducing emissions and its comprehensive approach to mitigate the effects of climate change on Victorian society. It is essential that *the Strategy* is embedded in a broader approach to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, beyond practical and logistical elements of reducing emissions. As a member of the Climate and Health Alliance, the APS strongly advocates for the adoption of the *Healthy, Regenerative and Just' Framework* to underpin a holistic approach.⁵ This framework sets out actions and responsible stakeholders to support communities to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. We support the IPCC in their statement that "Maladaptation can be avoided by flexible, multi-sectoral, inclusive, long-term planning and implementation of adaptation actions, with co-benefits to many sectors and systems." (p.19)⁶.

As the Australian leading peak body for psychologists, we see more opportunities to prepare individuals and the health system for the mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change and associated natural disasters. The impacts of climate change on mental health and wellbeing are pervasive. As it is currently conceptualised, *the Strategy* does not appropriately acknowledge the underlying relationship mental health and wellbeing have with social determinants of health outcomes such as housing, connection to country, heat, food and water and energy security⁷. Acute and potentially chronic health impacts include climate and eco anxiety and/or solastalgia⁸⁻¹⁰, as well as the trauma associated with surviving a disaster^{8,11,12}. As psychologists, our members have a deep appreciation of what impacts these social determinants and other climate change related phenomena can have on mental health and wellbeing (p. 3)⁷. Despite these factors being affected by climate change, addressing such social determinants of health does not appear to be directly in scope for *the Strategy*.

The APS Position and Recommendations for Psychology and Climate Change

The APS has detailed our position on climate change in our evidence-informed [APS Position Statement: Psychology and Climate Change](#)¹³ and in other documents such as the [APS Submission to the National Health and Climate Strategy Consultation](#)¹⁴, [APS Submission to the Inquiry into the Climate Change Amendment \(Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity\) Bill 2023](#)¹⁵ and the [APS Pre-Budget Submission 2023-2024](#)¹⁶.

In summary, the APS position on climate change is as follows.

- The APS accepts the consensus of authoritative Australian and international scientists that human activities, particularly since the mid-20th century, have resulted in a steep growth in greenhouse gas concentrations, causing substantial global warming and generating a high risk of catastrophic climate change (e.g., 17,18).
- The APS acknowledges the increasingly significant and disastrous consequences of climate change, such as the growing frequency and intensity of natural disasters like bushfires and flooding, that Australians and citizens around the globe have experienced in recent years¹⁹.
- The APS identifies climate change as the foremost threat to 21st-century health and wellbeing, affecting Australians, future generations and humanity at large but having unequal impact across geography, generations and socioeconomic strata^{20,21}.
- The APS calls attention to the well-established impacts of climate change on mental health and wellbeing^{22,23}. Both the direct effects and threat of climate change can arouse deep feelings, ranging from fear through to anger and despair, which can in turn negatively impact aspects of health, wellbeing and an individual's capacity to function and contribute to the broader community²⁴.
- The APS stands strong with Australian and international scientists who continue to call urgently for more significant responses to climate change mitigation and adaption at the national, organisational and community levels.

Considering the urgency of the climate crisis and the importance of understanding and addressing its psychological and health dimensions, the APS has made numerous recommendations including that Governments, industries, organisations and the public must:

- Acknowledge the urgency of the climate crisis,
- Develop effective strategies to mitigate climate change, minimise climate change impacts, and promote successful community adaptation and resilience, and
- Pay particular attention to equity and justice for marginalised and vulnerable groups in developing strategies.

The APS has highlighted as part of our advocacy efforts that psychology professionals have the knowledge, skills, resources and willingness to:

- Assist governments, communities and individuals to prepare for and reduce the risks of climate-related events such as floods and bushfires (environmental adaptation), and help individuals and communities adapt to their psychosocial impacts (psychological adaptation), which is consistent with the initiatives outlined in the Victorian Government's [Education and Training Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-26](#),
- Address barriers to behavioural change for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and motivate and support the needed changes, and
- Deliver effective, evidence-based psychological first aid immediately after climate-related disasters, including via first responder programs such as our [APS Disaster Response Network](#), and support to individuals and communities over the longer term. The success of the network has been dependent on effective collaboration between national co-ordination organisations and local, community-based partners, supporting each other to help those affected by disasters.

The Impacts of Climate Change on the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

In our advocacy, the APS has continued to draw attention to the ample evidence, internationally and nationally, that demonstrates that climate change and associated natural disasters are impacting the health and wellbeing of the vulnerable and marginalised in our society, including our children and young people (e.g., 25–31).

Research shows that children and young Australians are deeply concerned, and at times overwhelmed, by uncertainty associated with the climate crisis. For example, the annual Mission Australia Youth Survey in 2022, a nation-wide survey of 19,000 young people aged between 15 and 19, identified the distressing impact of climate change on our youth with 51% identifying the environment as one of the most important issues in Australia (up from 38% in 2021 and 29.8% in 2020), and 25.5% extremely or very concerned about climate change²⁵.

A subsequent report prepared by Orygen^{26,27} revealed that heightened climate concern among youth was associated with poor mental health and wellbeing as indicated by low subjective wellbeing (50% of respondents with heightened climate change concern), psychological distress (38%), a self-reported mental health condition (26%), poor coping (62%) and a pessimistic outlook (23%). The Orygen report identified that the connections between climate change and poor mental wellbeing were independent of other mental health risk factors and that these associations were more pronounced among vulnerable young people who identify as gender diverse, Indigenous or residing in regional/remote areas.

The World Health Organisation has this month released an urgent call to action that highlights how climate hazards also heighten risks to mothers and babies during pregnancy³². This includes physical health implications of climate change, such as gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, premature delivery, low birth weights and stillbirths, but also lasting mental health impacts like stress, anxiety and depression, which are known risks for adverse perinatal outcomes and intergenerational trauma^{33–35}.

It is important to acknowledge that these impacts of climate change on the health and wellbeing of children and young people must be considered within the context of currently unacceptably high levels of psychological distress and mental ill health for Australia's children and youth and in the perinatal period^{36–39}.

Climate Change Impacts on Other Vulnerable Groups

In addition to young people, there are other vulnerable groups who are particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of climate change. It is important that *the Strategy* acknowledges this, and related action and implementation plans outline targeted initiatives to support these groups. Although this is not a comprehensive list, we would identify the following groups as particularly vulnerable to negative mental health and wellbeing impacts as a result of climate change ^{see also 1}. Attention must be paid to people who experience intersectional disadvantage.

- **First Nations people:** the unique impact of colonisation means that First Nations people are not the same as other vulnerable groups. There must be deep recognition of the intergenerational trauma⁴⁰ and ongoing disenfranchisement that has been created in Australian society. We must also acknowledge that many of the social determinants of health are not uniform across communities. Interaction with the criminal justice system,⁴¹ racism and discrimination,⁴² disconnection from country, service inequalities, educational outcomes, and health outcomes, are some of the many factors that may in-part explain why our First Nations people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. These must be addressed appropriately in order to see tangible progress.
- **Rural and remote residents:** rural and remote Australians are more likely to have experienced different forms of disasters¹⁰ and are more likely to rely on the land and climate for income. In addition, rural and remote Australians are particularly vulnerable which is further exacerbated by inequities in healthcare spending, access and support^{10,43}.
- **Women and families:** women are disproportionately affected by impacts on housing and social networks post-disaster and this often leads to a decreased capacity for paid employment^{7,44,45}.
- **People already experiencing poor mental and physical health**¹¹.

APS Recommendations

If *the Strategy* is to genuinely engage with mitigating the impact of climate change and improving the health of Victorians (specifically including mental health), there must be specific objectives and timeframes for action. We acknowledge that details regarding initiatives may be developed later, however, it is important that these are considered primary to *the Strategy*'s success, not secondary to other targets (for example, reducing emissions).

Victoria must be prepared as much as possible for impending climate change impacts. This includes: (a) providing every resident with the psychological tools and resources to build resilience in preparation for future climate change impacts, (b) building the capacity of psychologists and other mental health professionals to be best equipped to support communities in the wake of disasters, and (c) ensuring we are not duplicating efforts with other initiatives at local, state, and national levels. In particular, we suggest that *the Strategy*:

- **Highlights the strong, multi-faceted interactions between the effects of climate change and mental health and wellbeing:** it is well established that there are both direct and indirect impacts of climate change on mental health^{11,12}. The mental health and wellbeing effects of climate change need to be elevated and prioritised in *the Strategy* as more evidence becomes available. They underpin many other aspects of health, wellbeing and an individual's capacity to contribute to the broader community.
- **Builds Victorians' resilience using a community-based, preventative approach:** the scale and broad impacts of climate change mean that the health system and health professionals in isolation will be unable to address the psychosocial impacts of climate change.

Evidence suggests that proactive investment in ‘cohesive communities’ is helpful to buffer the effects of disasters⁴⁶. *The Strategy* must take a preventative and health promotion approach to mental health and wellbeing, that equips each community with networks of people with skills, such as psychological first aid and peer support¹. Initiatives such as the [APS Disaster Response Network](#) can help provide support to those who work or volunteer in highly stressful or demanding roles in response to disasters, emergencies, and other community events.

- **Be guided by First Nations Victorians’, knowledges and wisdom is crucial:** we can learn a great deal from First Nations people’s knowledges about living in harmony with the land, seas, and sky. We believe that much greater attention to this is required in *the Strategy*. This could be through a distinct arm of *the Strategy* or, ideally, in a dedicated strategy which is co-produced utilising the expertise, leadership, and knowledges of First Nations people and communities. This should be part of a broader conversation regarding their mental health and wellbeing.
- **Include psychological science to support initiatives to motivate and promote behaviour change:** climate change adaptation and mitigation can be facilitated by all levels of government working toward a common goal. At a state level, psychologically informed and evidence-based initiatives which support pro-environmental behaviour should be supported^{1, see 47}.
- **Supports psychologists and mental health professionals affected by climate change:** recent research shows that since 2019, 31% of psychologists have been personally affected by climate-related disasters⁸. In these situations, psychologists often have a role to support the community while also having lived experience of the disaster themselves. Dual roles are particularly common in rural and remote areas. Psychologists need systemic and organisational support to engage in committed self-care and to be trained and professionally supervised to manage these roles in the community⁸.
- **Grow the psychological workforce to sufficient meet demand and prepare for the future:** The APS is cognisant of the current workforce shortages across the entire mental health sector⁴⁸. Governments need to work together to implement policies and initiatives that grow the psychology workforce to ensure the chronic undersupply of psychologists does not continue. In previous submissions and correspondence^{e.g 49}, the APS has called on governments to (1) appropriately fund post-graduate psychology courses, (2) support paid psychology placements and their coordination, and (3) provide adequate provisions for supervisors (including training). While we acknowledge that some of these are Federal issues, we urge the Victorian government to support initiatives to grow the psychological workforce in Victoria.
- **Equip Victorians to be more resilient to the effects of climate change:** the scale of the impacts of climate change require a public health, preventative approach to provide Australians with the psychological tools and resources to be resilient to climate change impacts¹. Ideally, this should be facilitated at a community level to distribute the responsibility beyond health professionals. We commend, however, the Victorian Government’s [Education and Training Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-26](#), which is referenced in *the Strategy*.
- **Ensure psychological expertise is incorporated into *the Strategy*’s governance structures:** psychologists have an evidence-informed understanding of many aspects that are critical to the success of *the Strategy*.
- **Design programs with ongoing monitoring and evaluation in mind** – ongoing monitoring and evaluation is essential to the success of *the Strategy*. However, simply collecting data regarding the performance of the initiatives of *the Strategy* is insufficient – data must be integrated and utilised. *The Strategy* should underpin a living and learning culture that adapts to the needs of Victorians as new information is received.

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