Western Sydney Health Alliance
For healthy communities in the Western Parkland City
An initiative of the Western Sydney City Deal

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY
Urban Transformations Research Centre

Health-Centred Climate Adaptation: Implementation Pathways for Councils

Implementation summary translating research evidence into practical governance, planning, and infrastructure decision-making

Prepared by Western Sydney Health Alliance in partnership with the Urban Transformations Research Centre, Western Sydney University.

Purpose and implementation focus

This implementation summary **supports councils to integrate climate and health considerations** into core governance, planning, and infrastructure decision-making. It builds on peer-reviewed diagnostic research and the accompanying *Health-Centred Climate Adaptation: An Action Guide for Councils*, which together identify both implementation barriers and enabling pathways.

Together, the diagnostic research, Action Guide, and this implementation summary form an integrated evidence-to-implementation pathway supporting councils to move from recognising climate–health risks to embedding practical, evidence-based responses within core planning, governance, and infrastructure systems.

Access the Action Guide here: https://wshealthalliance.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Climate-resilience-council-guide-1.docx

This implementation pathway supports councils to:

Reflect on research findings in relation to their own governance, planning, and asset management systems

Examine how climate–health risks affect asset condition, service delivery, community wellbeing, and

Identify practical implementation pathways within existing organisational, planning, and budget

Strengthen internal business cases to support climate–health integration

Why this matters now

Councils across Australia are facing increasing exposure to climate-related hazards, including extreme heat, flooding, and environmental stress, with direct implications for community health, service demand, asset condition, and long-term financial sustainability.

Local governments play a critical, globally recognised role in climate adaptation and public health protection. As the tier closest to communities, councils' decisions on planning, infrastructure, asset management and service delivery directly shape exposure to climate risks such as heat, flooding and environmental hazards.

This work is embedded through established statutory planning and asset management cycles, with regular review and updates of key documents including Community Strategic Plans, Local Strategic Planning Statements (LSPSs), Local Environmental Plans (LEPs), Development Control Plans (DCPs) and asset management plans.This creates opportunities nationally for councils to strengthen how climate and health risks are defined, evaluated, and addressed within core planning and investment decisions.

These planning and infrastructure decision points have long-term implications for:

- community health outcomes and service demand
- asset condition, durability, and maintenance costs
- asset lifespan and replacement cycles
- long-term financial exposure and budget pressures

This **aligns directly with councils' core responsibilities** for protecting community wellbeing, stewarding public assets, managing risk, and ensuring long-term financial sustainability.

Why climate–health integration strengthens core council functions

Integrating climate–health considerations strengthen core council responsibilities by improving:

Risk management
Climate-related hazards increase infrastructure stress, maintenance needs, and service demand. Addressing risks early reduces future operational and financial exposure.

Asset protection and lifecycle resilience
Infrastructure designed for changing climate conditions performs better over time, reducing premature deterioration and replacement costs

Financial sustainability
Early investment reduces long-term costs associated with reactive maintenance, asset failure, and service demand.

Business case strength
Climate–health considerations strengthen investment justification by demonstrating avoided costs, improved asset performance, and long-term value using the same risk, asset lifecycle, and financial management logic applied to roads, drainage, and other core infrastructure.

Sustainable growth and community wellbeing
Climate-resilient infrastructure enables growth that is safer, healthier, and more liveable. It reduces community exposure to heat and other hazards, supports everyday mobility and access to services, and helps protect vulnerable groups. Over time, this contributes to stronger community wellbeing, greater equity, and improved

This positions climate adaptation as essential infrastructure planning rather than discretionary expenditure.

Priority actions to support climate-health integration

Consistent with the research findings and Action Guide, priority areas include:

1. **Use pilots to enable evidence-based implementation**
   Pilot projects generate locally relevant evidence, reduce uncertainty, and inform future decisions. Where possible, co-run pilots with neighbouring councils and share results so each council contributes evidence without funding every trial.

2. **Design for longevity from day one**
   Build in ownership, maintenance, and funding upfront. Use a simple BAU checklist to assign an owner, document operations and maintenance (O&M), and engage key teams early (assets, roads, procurement, finance, risk, community).

3. **Embed climate–health in core asset and planning systems**
   Integrate climate–health considerations into asset lifecycle planning, infrastructure design, and statutory planning to strengthen long-term infrastructure performance.

4. **Strengthen whole-of-life business cases**
   Use whole-of-life costing and avoided-cost analysis to improve investment justification and support financial sustainability.

5. **Break silos through collaboration**
   Strengthen coordination across planning, infrastructure, environment, and community teams through shared measures and shared decision points—supported by exec leadership, a cross-functional working group, and a project-plan checkbox confirming key consultations.

6. **Strengthen evaluation and organisational learning**
   Build evaluation into projects to support stronger business cases, continuous improvement, and shared learning across councils.

7. **Pair evidence with storytelling**
   Combine monitoring data with a clear narrative that resonates with councillors and communities (comfort, safety, footfall, fairness).

8. **Co-design with expectations managed**
   Undertake co-design with transparent trade-offs and clear decision logic to maintain trust and feasibility.

These priorities provide practical entry points that councils can begin integrating through existing planning reviews, asset management updates, pilot projects, and capital works programs, enabling implementation within current governance and operational framework

Role of implementation support and research partnerships

Implementation workshops and research partnerships help councils to:

- Identify barriers and enabling pathways
- Access evidence to strengthen internal business cases
- Build evaluation and monitoring capability to track outcomes over time
- Share learning across councils and regions
- Interpret research findings in their organisational context
- Identify governance and operational changes within local influence
- Align climate–health considerations with existing planning and asset management processes
- Strengthen internal communication and leadership engagement

This work supports councils to embed climate–health considerations into core infrastructure planning, asset management, and financial stewardship—strengthening long-term resilience, service performance, public value, financial sustainability, and community wellbeing.

Evidence base and implementation pathway

This implementation summary forms part of a structured evidence-to-implementation pathway:

Diagnostic research → Action Guide → Implementation support (this document) → Organisational application

The research, led by the Urban Transformations Research Centre (UTRC), Western Sydney University, in partnership with the Western Sydney Health Alliance (WSHA) and supported by the national Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA), was undertaken as part of the Increasing Resilience to Climate Change (IRCC) program, funded by the NSW Government and Local Government NSW. The research identifies systemic barriers and enabling conditions shaping climate–health integration in local government.

While grounded in empirical research conducted with Western Sydney councils, the findings and implementation pathways are directly relevant to councils across Australia and internationally facing similar climate, infrastructure, governance, and public health challenges.

Published source:
Morrison, N., Harris, P., & McIntyre, E. (2025)
Health-centred climate adaptation: Insights from local governments in Western Sydney, Australia.
Urban Climate, 54, 102617

Access the published article here:
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212095525003335