



# Hot cities: Attending with care to life with increased heat



**We are living with increased heat. Australia has already experienced 1.5 degrees of warming since 1910. Globally, 2024 was the hottest year on record.**

In cities, urban heat islands compound and extend the effects of extreme and severe summer heat, causing much more than sleepless nights. Warped train lines, electricity systems pushed to the limit, and heat-related physical and mental ill-health; air thick with pollutants from wildfires and warnings for those at risk to stay indoors. These are here and now, not dystopian futures.

Living with increased heat requires multiple and collaborative approaches.

**Beyond substantially reducing – better yet, stopping – greenhouse gas emissions, heat adaptation demands careful responses that attend to and support the care work of people, plants and animals, and infrastructures that sustain, and can help regenerate life in cities and regions.**

## **The scalar challenges of cool housing and neighbourhoods**

For many, our homes and neighbourhoods are not designed for climate, let alone the changing one we are experiencing.

Housing in Australia lags similar nations overseas when it comes to its thermal quality. Households are increasingly turning to air-conditioning to keep cool but installing these systems in leaky and uninsulated homes is a band-aid solution. We need more substantial energy and thermal upgrades of homes to respond to equity, health and carbon abatement challenges.

Heat, however, flows through urban fabrics. This means we must look holistically beyond housing to the streets and neighbourhoods where we dwell, and the systems that shape this dwelling. Such governance and decision-making must be multi-scalar, collaborative and proactive. It means targeted heat-health messaging alongside urban greening. It means cooler precincts and cool spaces alongside the adapted design of primary health and service delivery like food provision, maternal and child health, and education.

## **Heat will increasingly shape urban mobilities**

Cities and their inhabitants are constantly in motion. There is the movement of people walking, driving, or taking trams or trains to work, school pickup in the hot afternoon sun, or visiting friends

and loved ones. There is the slithering and pattering of animals and plants; the creep of built infrastructures encroaching on green space.

Extreme heat shapes these mobilities with significant and wide-ranging social and economic implications, particularly when infrastructures break down or pathways are too hot or dangerous to travel.

## Social connection is a key factor in how people and communities more vulnerable to heat cope, or not.

It is not only that at-risk people can become isolated in hot homes, but that the movement of loved ones and those providing key services during heat events may also be impacted.

### Heat and urban rhythms

Time is also important when it comes to governing life with increased heat. Leaving aside the importance of stopping current and future carbon emissions, time matters at the everyday level. Urban heat islands, where heat is absorbed by

concrete and other hard surfaces, exacerbate heat's ill-effects, extending hot days into hot nights.

Meanwhile, daily routines and schedules shape peaks in electricity demand. School hours, calendars and work commitments shape the routines of families despite the heat.

In the heat, bodies need to slow down. But essential workers and services must continue. 'Essential' is a broad term here, capturing those in health care, education, food systems, critical infrastructure, and those caring for family and friends. Increased heat requires we attend to the challenges of maintaining and delivering this essential care work, despite the weather.

Increased heat demands careful work in urban and regional places to shape adaptation responses to an overheated and changing climate. This is not only about collaboratively and proactively designing and making cooler environments, but designing systems to ensure those most at risk are not left worse off.

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