



Merri-bek
City Council

Extreme Heat Complementary Plan

2026 – 2029

Version 5



Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC) acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Version Control

This Complementary Plan should be evaluated on an annual basis and reviewed every 3 years by the Extreme Heat Coordination Group and the MEMPC.

Date	Version	Page #	Description	Amended by
01/06/2010 – 23/12/2018	V1 – V3	All	Construction, reviews and updates	Andrew Day Samantha Sharp Zoe Smith
5/11/2020	V3.2	All	Review and Update	Eliza Tipping James Boyce DFFH
24/11/2021	V3.3		Review and Update	Eliza Tipping
28/10/2022	V3.4	All	Review and Update	Martha Martin
12/12/2022	V3.5	All	Updated with new legislation, roles, UHIE and demographics	Martha Martin
24/11/2023	V4.0	All	Full rewrite and review	Martha Martin
11/01/2024	V4.1	All	Changes as per feedback for finalisation	Martha Martin
15/06/2026	V5.0	All	Three yearly review and update	Martha Martin MEMPC

MEMPC Endorsement

This document has been adopted by the members of the Merri-bek City Council Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee as representatives and with authority of their agencies on the:

12 August 2026

The signature below indicates that this document has been approved for release under the delegation of the Unit Manager Environmental Health on behalf of the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee



Leo Manca

Unit Manager Environmental Health

Acronyms/Glossary

Acronym	Full Title
ARC	Australian Red Cross
AV	Ambulance Victoria
BCP	Business Continuity Plan
Blackout	Total loss of power to a wide area for an extended period
BoM	Bureau of Meteorology
Brownout	Drop in the magnitude of voltage in an electrical power system
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEOC	Council Emergency Operations Centre
CERA	Community Emergency Risk Assessment
CHO	Chief Health Officer
CHSP	Commonwealth Home Support Program
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
DH	Department of Health
DJSIR	Department Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
EHCG	Extreme Heat Coordination Group
EHF	Excess Heat Factor
EMV	Emergency Management Victoria
ESV	Energy Safe Victoria
FRV	Fire Rescue Victoria
HACC	Home and Community Care
HESP	State Emergency Management Plan: Health Emergencies Sub-Plan
HR	Human Resources
LGA	Local Government Area
MCC	Merri-bek City Council
MEMO	Municipal Emergency Management Officer
MEMP	Municipal Emergency Management Plan
MERC	Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator
MRM	Municipal Recovery Manager
OHSR	OHS and Risk
SEMP	State Emergency Management Plan
SES	State Emergency Service
VicPol	Victoria Police
VCCEM	Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministry

Framework

This document is a risk-based complementary plan of the Merri-bek City Council Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP). Background information on the municipality and detailed information on supplementary emergency management arrangements can be found in the MEMP. The plan aligns with and should be read in the context of the following documents that are available on the Merri-bek City Council website:

State Plans

- [SEMP Extreme Heat Sub-Plan.docx](#)
- [SEMP Health Emergencies Sub-Plan 2025_0.docx](#)

Resources

- [Extreme heat and heatwaves \(health.vic.gov.au\)](#)
- [Heatwave Knowledge Centre \(bom.gov.au\)](#)
- [Public health and wellbeing planning and climate change | health.vic.gov.au](#)

Within a legislative context, this plan complies and aligns with the following legislation:

- [Emergency Management Act 2013 \(legislation.vic.gov.au\)](#)
- [Local Government Act 2020 \(legislation.vic.gov.au\)](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 \(legislation.vic.gov.au\)](#)
- [Climate Action Act 2017](#)
- [Planning and Environment Act 1987 \(legislation.vic.gov.au\)](#)

Municipal Plans

- [Municipal Emergency Management Plan \(merri-bek.vic.gov.au\)](#)
- Merri-bek Municipal Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan
- [Merri-bek's council plan](#) (Inclusive of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan)
- [Merri-bek Climate Risk Strategy](#)
- [Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan](#)

Municipal Policies/Plans

- Business Continuity Plan - D24/249532
- Departmental Heat Management Plans
- Heat Management Procedure - D21/25627

Background

In September 2025, Merri-bek Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee identified Extreme Heat as a **high** risk in the municipality via the Community Emergency Risk Assessment (CERA). It is anticipated that extreme heat will occur in the geographic area of the City of Merri-bek and due to the consequences associated with this type of hazard.

The Extreme Heat Plan provides an overall framework for Council's planning, preparation, response, and recovery in relation to extreme heat and activation of this plan.

Aim

The aim of this Complementary Plan is to outline the municipal arrangements for the coordinated prevention, preparedness, response and recovery associated with extreme heat events that may impact the community, infrastructure, the natural environment and the delivery of essential services within the City of Merri-bek.

The complementary plan provides a staged approach to extreme heat management that aims to:

- Ensure timely health information, advice and support are available to the community, particularly people at increased risk of heat-related illness and other vulnerable groups.

- Strengthen partnerships and collaborative arrangements with government agencies, community organisations and service providers to support an effective and coordinated response to extreme heat events.
- Increase staff awareness of the impacts of extreme heat and implement internal processes that support the continuity of Council operations and the delivery of essential services.
- Promote long-term, sustainable approaches that increase community resilience and encourage behaviours that reduce the impacts of extreme heat on individuals, families and the broader community.
- Support the protection of public health, community wellbeing and critical infrastructure during periods of extreme heat through coordinated planning, communication and service delivery.

Heatwaves

Often referred to as the "silent killer," extreme heat has resulted in more deaths in Australia than any other natural hazard. In addition to causing heat-related illness and fatalities, extreme heat can significantly impact community health and wellbeing, critical infrastructure, essential services, the economy, agriculture, biodiversity and the natural environment.

As the climate continues to warm, extreme heat events are projected to become more frequent, longer in duration and more intense, increasing the risks to communities and placing additional pressure on essential services and infrastructure.

A heatwave is generally defined as a period of unusually hot weather that is likely to have a negative impact on human health, the natural environment, infrastructure and community services. Heatwaves may also contribute to increased electricity demand, transport disruptions, power outages and a heightened risk of bushfire.

In Australia, heatwave warnings are issued in accordance with the National Heatwave Warning Service, which uses the Excess Heat Factor (EHF) methodology to assess heatwave intensity relative to local climate conditions and recent weather patterns. Heatwave planning and activation arrangements may vary across Victoria depending on local climatic and geographic conditions.

Victoria has experienced several significant extreme heat events. During January 2009, the State endured a prolonged heatwave with temperatures among the highest ever recorded, contributing to widespread health impacts and infrastructure failures. A further severe heatwave occurred in January 2014, again resulting in significant health impacts and increased demand on emergency and health services.

The frequency, duration and intensity of extreme heat events in Victoria are expected to increase as a result of climate change, reinforcing the need for coordinated planning, preparedness, response and recovery arrangements across all levels of government and the community.

Heat and Climate Change

Merri-bek City Council declared a Climate Emergency in September 2018, recognising that climate change poses significant risks to the municipality's environment, economy, infrastructure and community wellbeing. Without meaningful action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to a changing climate, these risks are expected to increase over time.

Climate change is contributing to more frequent, prolonged and intense extreme heat events across Victoria, increasing the likelihood of adverse health outcomes, pressure on critical infrastructure and disruption to essential services.

Further information regarding the impacts of climate change and Council's adaptation initiatives can be found in the [Merri-bek Climate Risk Strategy](#) and [Climate Risk Foundational Action Plan 2023 - 2025](#).

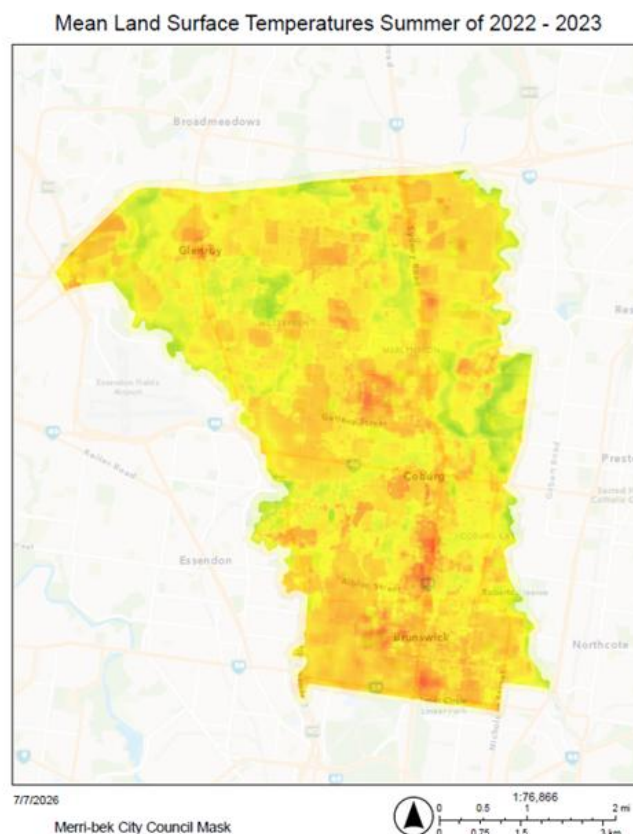
Urban Heat Island Effect

The City of Merri-bek experiences the Urban Heat Island Effect (UHIE), where built-up urban areas become significantly hotter than surrounding areas, particularly during periods of extreme heat. Urban areas also tend to retain heat overnight, reducing opportunities for cooling and increasing health risks.

The Urban Heat Island Effect is influenced by several factors, including:

- Extensive hard surfaces such as asphalt, concrete and paved areas that absorb, store and re-radiate heat. These surfaces also reduce rainwater infiltration into the soil, limiting moisture available for vegetation and reducing natural evaporative cooling.
- Limited tree canopy and vegetation, resulting in reduced shading and lower levels of evapotranspiration that would otherwise cool the surrounding environment.
- Increased urban density and redevelopment, which can reduce green space and create built environments that retain and trap heat.
- Construction materials with high heat absorption and low solar reflectivity, including brick, concrete, terracotta tiles and bitumen surfaces.
- Dense urban form that restricts airflow and limits the dispersal of accumulated heat.
- Heat generated from human activities, including vehicle traffic, industrial activities and air conditioning systems.
- Air pollution and atmospheric conditions that may contribute to the retention of heat within urban environments.

The map below identifies areas within the municipality that are more susceptible to the Urban Heat Island Effect (based on analysis by RMIT University of land surface temperatures in the summer of 2022-2023). These areas include Brunswick, Central Coburg, areas along Sydney Road, and the Glenroy Activity Centre.



Extreme Heat Vulnerability Profile

Extreme heat poses a risk to everyone if appropriate precautions are not taken. However, certain members of the community are more vulnerable to heat-related illness and adverse outcomes due to age, health status, social circumstances, housing conditions or reduced capacity to adapt.

In addition to health impacts, extreme heat events can have significant social, economic, environmental and infrastructure consequences, affecting community connectedness, service delivery, biodiversity and the built environment.

While many people have the knowledge, resources and capacity to manage safely during periods of extreme heat, others may face barriers that reduce their ability to respond effectively. Identifying those most at risk enables Council and partner agencies to target preparedness activities, public information and support services to those who may require additional assistance.

The degree of vulnerability during extreme heat is influenced by a combination of individual health, age, housing conditions, social connectedness, access to cooling, and the ability to modify behaviour. Individuals may belong to multiple vulnerability groups, increasing their risk of heat-related illness.

The following table identifies priority groups within the Merri-bek community that may be at increased risk during extreme heat events and outlines the potential impacts experienced by each group.

People at Increased Risk	Why They Are Vulnerable	Considerations During Extreme Heat
Older people (65 years and over, particularly those living alone)	Reduced ability to regulate body temperature, chronic illness, social isolation and reduced mobility. Possible cost of living pressures, and/or over social compliance with requests to reduce electricity for rolling brownouts etc.	Encourage regular welfare checks, hydration, access to cool environments and support services.
Infants and young children	Immature temperature regulation and dependence on carers for hydration and cooling.	Ensure adequate fluids, cool environments and supervision during hot weather.
People with chronic medical conditions	Conditions such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, kidney disease and diabetes increase susceptibility to heat-related illness.	Encourage adherence to medical advice, medication management and early medical assistance if symptoms develop.
People with disability	May have reduced mobility, communication barriers or reliance on carers and electrically powered medical equipment.	Ensure continuity of care, access to cooling and contingency planning for power outages.
People requiring electrically powered medical equipment	Power interruptions may affect essential life-support equipment.	Encourage emergency backup plans and registration with relevant electricity distributors where appropriate.

People at Increased Risk	Why They Are Vulnerable	Considerations During Extreme Heat
People taking certain medications	Some medications interfere with hydration, sweating or body temperature regulation.	Encourage consultation with healthcare providers and increased monitoring during extreme heat.
Pregnant women	Increased physiological stress and higher risk of dehydration and heat exhaustion.	Promote hydration, rest and avoidance of prolonged heat exposure.
Outdoor workers and volunteers	Prolonged exposure to high temperatures increases risk of heat stress and dehydration.	Implement heat-safe work practices, adequate hydration, shade and rest breaks.
Outdoor sports participants and event attendees	Physical exertion during hot conditions increases the risk of heat illness.	Modify, postpone or cancel activities where necessary and ensure adequate hydration and shade.
People experiencing homelessness	Limited access to cool environments, drinking water and shelter.	Provide access to cooling spaces, water and outreach support services.
People living in poor-quality housing or without air conditioning	Homes may retain heat, particularly overnight, increasing exposure.	Promote access to community cooling places and heat health advice.
Socially isolated people	May not receive information or assistance and may delay seeking help.	Encourage neighbour and community welfare checks and support networks.
People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities	Language or cultural barriers may reduce access to heat health information and services.	Provide translated information and culturally appropriate communication.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	May experience additional social and health inequities that increase vulnerability to extreme heat.	Work with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and community leaders to provide culturally appropriate support.
Companion animals	Animals are also susceptible to heat stress and dehydration.	Encourage owners to provide shade, water and avoid exercise during the hottest parts of the day.

Heat Health Risk Index by SA1 (Beta)

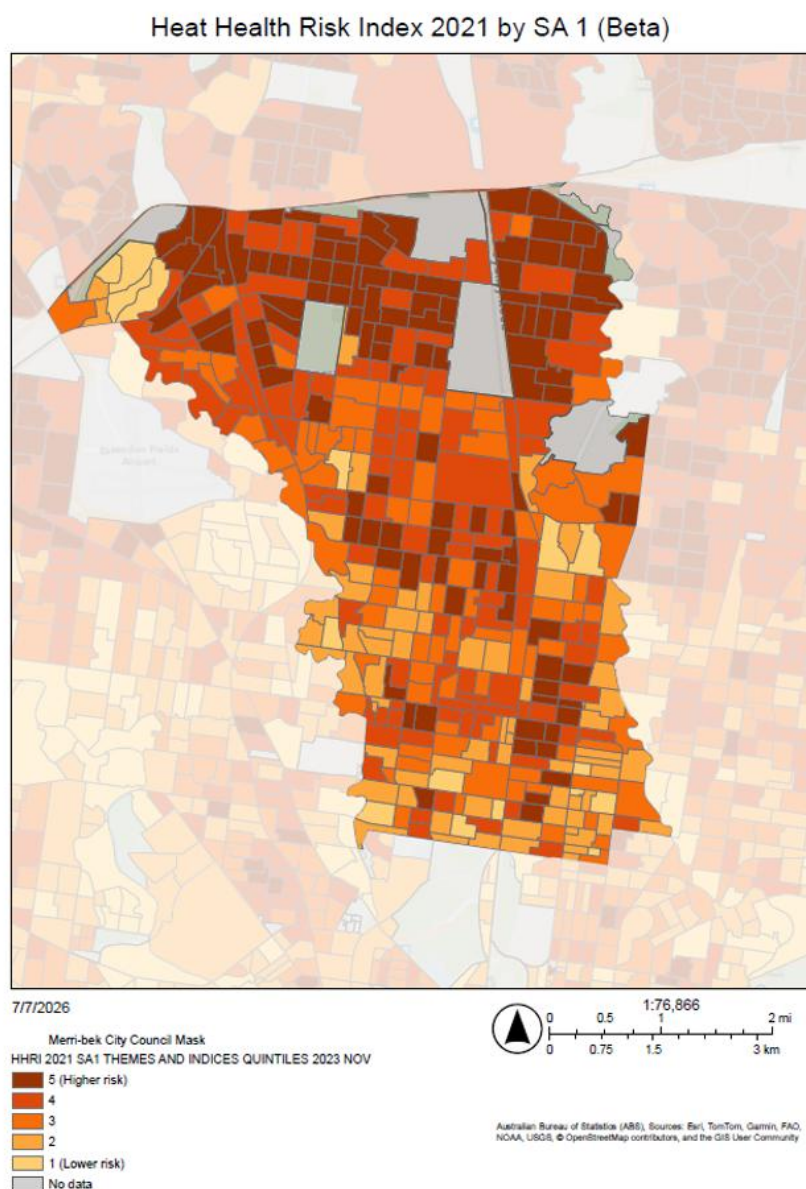
This Australian Bureau of Statistics developed the [Heat-Health Risk Index](#), a dataset containing several indices related to risks to human health from heatwaves. The indices were developed for the purpose of developing a National Climate Risk Assessment methodology for the Australian Climate Service (ACS). This data is intended to support decision making on mitigation, preparedness and response options to extreme heat that may reduce hazard exposure and social vulnerability. The indices are intended to be used as one line of evidence and considered alongside other data/information about specific places.

The index consists of the following:

- Heat exposure index
- Housing condition index
- Socioeconomic status

- Household composition
- Language and culture
- Health status
- Vulnerability
- Cool place accessibility
- Social connectedness
- Healthcare accessibility
- Adaptive capacity

The map below shows that areas in the northern suburbs of Fawkner, Glenroy and Hadfield, and some areas in Coburg, Pascoe Vale and Brunswick, face higher risks.



Demographic Snapshot

Age structure

Service age group (years)	Number	%
Babies and pre-schoolers (0 to 4)	9,731	5.7

Service age group (years)	Number	%
Primary schoolers (5 to 11)	12,169	7.1
Secondary schoolers (12 to 17)	8,813	5.1
Tertiary education and independence (18 to 24)	15,424	9.0
Young workforce (25 to 34)	37,163	21.7
Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49)	39,364	23.0
Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59)	18,588	10.8
Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69)	12,957	7.6
Seniors (70 to 84)	12,460	7.3
Elderly aged (85 and over)	4,682	2.7

Need for assistance

In 2021, there were 11,065 people with a need for assistance, living in the City of Merri-bek. Need for assistance via the Census data refers to people who require assistance with self-care, body movement or communication activities. Of this, the highest proportion were those 85 years and older.

Ethnicity/Place of birth

Ethnicity/Birthplace	Number	%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1,084	1.7
Total overseas born	56,427	31.2
Australia	107,728	62.9
Not stated	7,203	4.2

Language spoken at home

There are 86 languages other than English spoken at home. The top five languages are Italian, Arabic, Greek, Urdu and Nepali.

Language summary	Number	%
Speaks English only	104,555	61.0
Non-English total	59,120	34.5
Not stated	7,682	4.5

Business

Merri-bek has a variety of businesses and industries located within the area. The top five local industries include Construction (16.5%), Professional Scientific and Technical Services (14.7%), Transport, Rental, Hiring and Real Estate (9.3%). Merri-bek also has the longest shopping strip in the Southern Hemisphere, as well as various other retail precincts throughout the suburbs.

Consequences of extreme heat events in Merri-bek

Extreme heat events can cause significant harm to the individuals, groups, and communities. The types of harm caused by extreme heat events include:

- Illness, injury, or fatality
- Displacement of population from housing estates

- Decreased economic activity
- Disruption to public transport and electricity supply (including blackouts and brownouts)
- Increased staff absenteeism
- Increased anti-social behaviour
- Increased probability of fires
- Increased severity in the consequences of concomitant emergency events
- Stress to parks and gardens
- Stress and injury to domestic animals and wildlife
- Increased demand on medical and social facilities

Impact on physical health

When the surrounding temperature is higher than skin temperature the only effective heat-loss mechanism is sweating. Therefore, any factor that reduces the effectiveness of sweating can cause the body to overheat. The following table outlines the three types of heat-related illnesses:

Heat related illness	Symptoms
Heat cramps	Usually muscle pains or spasms, commonly occurring in the abdomen, arms or legs and may be a symptom of heat exhaustion. Heat cramps may occur after strenuous activity in a hot environment, when the body gets depleted of salt and water.
Heat exhaustion	A serious condition that can develop into heat stroke. Someone experiencing heat exhaustion may appear pale and sweating. They may have a rapid heart rate, muscle cramps, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea, vomiting or fainting.
Heat stroke	<u>A life-threatening emergency.</u> It occurs when the body temperature rises above 40.5°C. The symptoms may be the same as for heat exhaustion, but the skin may be dry with no sweating, and the person's mental condition worsens. They may stagger, appear confused, have a fit or collapse and become unconscious.

Extreme heat events can also aggravate existing medical conditions. It has also been found there may be an increase in food borne illnesses due to the heat, incorrect storage of food and ongoing power outages.

Impact on Social Behaviour

Extreme heat has an impact on social behaviour. Research has shown the following may impact individuals during extreme heat which further exacerbates effects on mental health and social behaviours:

- Heat affects our biochemistry and can alter the production of serotonin and dopamine
- Raises the core temperature of our body
- Impacts the ability to sleep and get good quality sleep – insomnia
- Increases irritability and can heighten anxiety levels
- Can trigger stress responses
- Can affect a person's cognitive function
- Can affect the ability to maintain activities of daily living at home, work etc.
- Increase in the consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs

Evidence is beginning to emerge that drought and extreme heat events lead to higher rates of self-harm and suicide, as much as 8 per cent higher.

Impact on Infrastructure

Extreme heat events can impact on infrastructure including roads, train and tram tracks, and overhead power lines. This includes overhead power lines sagging, power failures or blackouts impacting the operation of electrified trains, trams, and traffic signals. Infrastructure stress compounds stress on the community, economy, and services. There is significant flow on

implications, particularly for those managing their heat stress with air-conditioning. Mass stranding of public transport passengers may also occur if outages are enough to disrupt transport services. Under the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP), there are two Sub-plans which support extreme heat events:

- [State Electricity and Gas Supply Sub-plan](#)
- [State Public Transport Disruption Sub-plan](#)

Impact on Economy

Extreme heat can reduce worker productivity, especially for those working outdoors or in heat-exposed roles. This may lower labour productivity, increase costs, and require workplace adjustments to reduce risks to staff.

Infrastructure and utility outages can reduce economic productivity and growth by disrupting business operations and limiting the availability of goods and services. Individuals may also face financial hardship if they rely on costly cooling methods such as air conditioning. Food safety may also be affected, leading to food spoilage and disposal, which can further impact businesses and the community.

Impact on the Natural Landscape

Merri-bek's natural landscapes are mainly located along waterway corridors. Due to the extent of urbanisation, these areas are limited, and extreme heat can reduce water health and vegetation cover along these corridors.

Impact on Wildlife and Pets

Wildlife and pets may be vulnerable to heat stress and heat-related illness. Animal owners should take steps to prepare for and protect animals during extreme heat, including:

- Bring pets indoors where possible.
- Provide shade for pets that remain outdoors.
- Do not leave pets in garages, sheds, or cars on hot days.
- Make sure pets have access to clean, fresh water at all times.
- Refrigerate pet food when needed.
- Avoid walking dogs during the hottest part of the day, and do not walk them on hot asphalt.
- Older and long-haired animals may be more vulnerable to heat.
- If a pet shows signs of lethargy, excessive panting, or breathing difficulties, place it in a cool (not icy) bath. If it does not improve, seek veterinary care.
- Provide containers of water in your garden for birds and wildlife.

Impact on Business Continuity

Extreme heat can disrupt business operations and service delivery, while related impacts such as power outages can further affect continuity. Businesses should have processes and procedures in place to respond effectively to extreme heat and power outages.

Business continuity considerations include:

- Increased staff absenteeism
- Staff fatigue and heat stress
- Power outages that suspend or stop work and service delivery
- High demand for air-conditioned facilities
- High demand for social services
- Reduced capacity to carry out outdoor work
- Cancelled public transport services
- Increased anti-social behaviour

Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

Within the City of Merri-bek, a range of stakeholders have important roles and responsibilities in the planning, preparedness, response and recovery phases of extreme heat events.

Emergency Management Commissioner

The Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) is the Coordinator for extreme heat events in Victoria. The EMC is responsible for the coordination of relevant agencies, ensuring effective control arrangements are in place and the consequences of extreme heat are being managed effectively.

Victoria Police

During an extreme heat event, Victoria Police undertake the Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator (MERC) function.

As extreme heat events can impact critical infrastructure, including electricity supply, transport systems and community health, Victoria Police play an important role in coordinating emergency response activities and supporting multi-agency coordination at the municipal level.

Bureau of Meteorology

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) issues Heatwave Warnings when severe or extreme heatwave conditions are forecast using the Excess Heat Factor (EHF) methodology.

Warnings may be issued up to four days in advance and are available through the BoM website and mobile application. [Heatwave services | The Bureau of Meteorology](#)

Chief Health Officer

The Victorian Chief Health Officer (CHO) may issue a Heat Health Warning where forecast temperatures are expected to pose a significant risk to public health, including circumstances where Bureau of Meteorology heatwave warning criteria are not met but a heat health risk is considered to exist.

Department of Health

The Department of Health (DH) is responsible for public health coordination and health system management during extreme heat events.

Individuals and service providers can subscribe to receive Heat Health Warnings and other health alerts through the Victorian Chief Health Officer Alerts and Advisories subscription service. The Department also publishes Heat Health Warnings and public health advice on its website.

During significant heat events, the Department may request information from Merri-bek City Council regarding local preparedness and response activities undertaken to support the community.

Public Health Units

Public Health Units (PHUs) provide regional public health leadership and coordination during extreme heat events. Working in partnership with the Department of Health, local government, health services and community organisations, PHUs support activities to minimise the public health impacts of extreme heat. Key responsibilities include:

- Monitoring public health risks and heat-related illness trends within the community.
- Providing public health advice and technical expertise to local agencies and stakeholders.
- Supporting the dissemination of heat health warnings, health messaging and community education.
- Coordinating public health responses for vulnerable populations and communities at increased risk of heat-related illness.
- Supporting health services and local government with situational awareness and information sharing regarding emerging public health issues.
- Assisting with surveillance of heat-related health impacts and identifying any emerging risks that may require intervention.

Public Health Units work collaboratively with local government, healthcare providers, emergency management agencies and community organisations to promote community resilience and reduce the health impacts associated with extreme heat events.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Under the State Emergency Management Plan Extreme Heat Sub-Plan, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) supports the management of extreme heat impacts for public housing residents.

DFFH maintains backup power arrangements within designated high-rise public housing buildings to enable essential building functions, including lift operation during power outages, allowing residents to safely exit buildings if required. DFFH has also identified community rooms within a number of housing complexes that may operate as cool places for tenants during extreme heat events.

Not-For-Profit, Community and Commercial Organisations

Not-for-profit organisations, community service providers and commercial organisations delivering services to vulnerable people are encouraged to develop and maintain their own extreme heat management and business continuity plans.

Guidance for health and community service providers before, during and after extreme heat events is available through the Victorian Heat Health Plan.

Within the City of Merri-bek, community organisations and service providers play an important role in monitoring and supporting vulnerable clients during periods of extreme heat. This includes providing timely heat health information, checking on client wellbeing where appropriate, and facilitating access to assistance where heat-related illness or other adverse impacts are identified.

Merri-bek City Council

It is recognised that local government, as the level of government closest to the community, is often the first point of contact for assistance, advice and information during an extreme heat event. Accordingly, a clear, coordinated and structured approach to planning, preparedness, response and recovery is essential.

For most extreme heat events, Merri-bek City Council is able to manage impacts through its existing operational framework and business continuity arrangements. However, severe or prolonged extreme heat events may require the reallocation of resources, activation of additional coordination arrangements, and enhanced collaboration with external agencies to support community wellbeing.

Extreme Heat Planning Committee

Planning for extreme heat requires a whole-of-organisation and multi-agency approach. The Extreme Heat Planning Committee comprises internal Council representatives and external partner agencies that have key responsibilities in the planning, preparedness, response and recovery associated with extreme heat events.

Committee membership includes:

Merri-bek City Council:

- Unit Manager Environmental Health
- Unit Manager Communications
- Coordinator Emergency Management
- Municipal Emergency Management Officer
- Municipal Recovery Manager
- Unit Manager Integrity Risk and Resilience
- Climate Resilience Integration Lead

External Agencies:

- Ambulance Victoria
- Department of Health

- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Merri Health
- Northern Health
- Victoria Police

The committee meets annually prior to summer to review the Extreme Heat Plan and ensure alignment with Commonwealth and Victorian policies and frameworks. The objectives of the committee are:

- Maintain the Extreme Heat Plan, policies and other plans which are consistent with the role of local government.
- Ensure alignment with Victorian and Australian legislation and frameworks, policies and plans in relation to heat.
- Develop, maintain and implement the Merri-bek Extreme Heat Plan.
- Support state and regional emergency management arrangements by representing local community needs

Heatwave Warnings

In Victoria, heat health arrangements are activated when forecast temperatures are expected to pose a risk to human health. The temperature thresholds used to identify heat health risks vary across the State to reflect local climate conditions and the community's level of acclimatisation. The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) issues Heatwave Warnings when severe or extreme heatwave conditions are forecast to affect ten per cent or more of a weather district. Heatwave warnings are based on the Excess Heat Factor (EHF), which measures periods of unusually high maximum and minimum temperatures over three consecutive days relative to the local climate and recent weather conditions.

Heatwave warnings may be issued up to **three days in advance**, allowing agencies, service providers and the community time to prepare for forecast conditions.

The EHF methodology compares forecast maximum and minimum temperatures over the following three days with historical climate data for that location, as well as temperatures experienced during the previous 30 days. This approach recognises that people gradually acclimatise to warmer conditions over the course of the season. As a result, temperatures that trigger a heatwave later in summer are generally higher than those required to trigger a heatwave at the beginning of summer.

Heatwaves are classified into three categories:

- **Low-intensity heatwaves** – Most people are able to cope with these conditions.
- **Severe heatwaves** – These conditions are likely to pose a risk to vulnerable people, including older persons, young children, pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions.
- **Extreme heatwaves** – These conditions pose a risk to the entire community, including otherwise healthy individuals.

Merri-bek is located within the Central Forecast District for Bureau of Meteorology heatwave warnings.

In addition to Bureau of Meteorology Heatwave Warnings, the Victorian Chief Health Officer (CHO) may issue a Heat Health Warning where forecast temperatures are expected to pose a significant public health risk. This may occur where Bureau of Meteorology heatwave warning thresholds are not met, but conditions such as a single day of exceptionally high temperatures or other factors are likely to adversely affect community health.

Heat Health Warning Subscription Service

The Victorian Department of Health provides a Heat Health Warning subscription service for local government, health services, emergency management agencies, community service organisations and other stakeholders. Members of the public may also subscribe to receive notifications.

Subscribers are advised when severe or extreme heat conditions are forecast and are encouraged to activate their heat health plans, business continuity arrangements, emergency management plans and occupational health and safety procedures, as appropriate.

Further information, including current Heatwave Warnings, is available from the Bureau of Meteorology website.

Extreme Heat Phases and Trigger Points

There are several phases and trigger points which may indicate the activation of this plan. The below table outlines warning trigger points which correspond to predicted extreme heat.

Phase	Trigger	Notification
Planning	An effective heatwave response requires planning to be undertaken prior to summer	
Phase 1: Notice and Preparation	Prior Notice	Heat Health Warnings issued may indicate one or more days of expected severe or extreme heat.
	36 hours' notice	- Relevant managers and supervisors activate Heatwave Local Area Plans and Heat Management Procedures. - Each department must ensure employees are aware of the heat health warning. - Ensure all employees are informed of the health warning. Information will be communicated through phone calls, the MCC website and intranet, site visits, and heatwave promotional material.
Phase 2: Low-intensity Heatwave	1-2 days heatwave	Departmental Managed Response: All departments are monitoring the heatwave impacts, using coping strategies and resources, and keeping management, staff and clients informed of impacts and rising issues.
Phase 3: Severe Heatwave	3-4 days heatwave	Coordinated Response: Flexible working arrangements are implemented if needed. Coordinators and managers are to ensure all impacted critical services have adequate resources and are closely monitored. - MEMO and MRM to determine if Extreme Heat Plan requires activation. If so, alert all Council staff and relevant external contacts - Monitor local conditions and Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) http://www.bom.gov.au/ - If the extreme heat event is expected to be prolonged, or if the Municipal Emergency Management Officer (MEMO) and/or MRM deem it necessary, the MEMO will establish contact with the Victoria Police MERC and determine whether any specific Council or MEMP activity is required. The MEMO will undertake an assessment of available resources and planning for power outages.
Phase 4: Extreme Heatwave	Heatwave of 4 or more days	Escalated Response: MRM and MEMO to consider community safety needs. Ensure staff and clients are implementing regular cooling strategies.

Phase	Trigger	Notification
Phase 5: Recovery (After extreme heatwave)	No trigger indicators in 7-day forecast	Deactivation: - MEMO to contact relevant managers and stand down personnel, arrange debrief with relevant personnel. - Review response to the heat event and record findings.

Extreme Heat Action Plan

There are several tasks which need to be undertaken and considered in relation to extreme heat and service provision to the community. The Heat Management Procedure (D21/25627) outlines nine key tasks to manage staffing and services. These include:

- Identifying heat illness hazards
- Controlling the risk of heat illness
- Required action on high heat days (outdoor staff)
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- If COVID 19 or Pandemic conditions – wearing a fitted/P2 face mask
- Wearing a P2 face mask for bushfire smoke
- Indoor employees – air conditioning
- Indoor employees – no air conditioning
- Training and consultation

The procedure outlines essential services and precautions and risk management to ensure additional precautions are in place.

Other departmental specific guidelines relating to service provision during an extreme heat event include:

- Extreme Heat and Weather Guidelines – Aged and Community Support
- Early Years and Youth – Extreme Heat Procedure
- Arts and Culture (Events) – Event Risk Management Plans - Weather Extremes: Heat, Cold, Wind, Rain, Storms

Building Community Resilience to Extreme Heat

Community resilience focuses on helping individuals, families and neighbourhoods develop the knowledge, skills, social connections and resources they need to safely cope with heat events before they become emergencies. Rather than relying on government intervention during every heatwave, resilient communities are better able to prepare, respond and recover independently. This approach includes:

- Educating residents about heat health risks and protective behaviours.
- Encouraging households to develop heatwave plans and identify cooler places in their homes.
- Supporting neighbours to check on older people, people with disabilities and socially isolated residents.
- Increasing access to shade, trees and cool public spaces.
- Working with community organisations to share information through trusted local networks.
- Improving housing and urban design to reduce heat exposure over the long term.
- Building community capacity through local leadership and preparedness programs.

The benefits include:

- Reduced heat-related illness and deaths.
- Increased community self-reliance.
- Stronger neighbourhood connections and social cohesion.

- Lower demand on emergency services and council resources.
- Better preparedness for increasingly frequent climate-related heat events.

Cooling Centres

Merri-bek does not open cooling centres during times of extreme heat due to the following:

- Cooling centres provide a reactive response rather than preventing heat-related impacts.
- They are typically only activated once extreme heat conditions have already developed.
- Many vulnerable people may be unable to access them due to mobility, transport, health or financial barriers.
- Establishing and operating cooling centres requires significant staffing, resources and ongoing operational costs.
- To date, there is limited direct evidence for the impact of real-world cooling centres on heat-related health outcomes¹

Merri-bek will advise the community of cool public spaces that may offer relief from heat, including libraries, leisure centres, neighbourhood houses and public buildings. Leisure centres and libraries may extend operating hours when there is a forecast Heatwave Warning.

Provision of Critical Services

Council provides a range of critical services where the disruption to the delivery of these services can have a significant adverse impact on the community. Continuity of critical services must be maintained regardless of temperature; The following services are examples of some of the services that have been identified as critical:

- Waste services
- Delivered meals preparation and delivery
- Maternal and Child Health and Immunisation
- Community transport
- Personal and respite care
- Fleet workshop
- School crossing supervisors
- Environmental Health
- Building Services

The following tables outline Council departments and key components of their response in each stage. Business Units within Merri-bek are advised to develop their own localised plan to identify minimum staffing requirements, triggers for service provision etc. This ensures service provision and business as usual is maintained in line with business continuity planning. There are five phases outlined in the Heat Action Plan which range from planning to response to recovery.

¹ Charles Dearman, Natalie Adams, Katya Brooks, Agostinho Sousa, Nicola Pearce-Smith, Carl Petrokofsky, Public health effectiveness of cooling centres during periods of adverse hot weather: a systematic literature review, Oxford Open Climate Change, Volume 5, Issue 1, 2025, kgaf020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfclm/kgaf020>

MERRI-BEK CITY COUNCIL – INDOOR STAFF					
PLANNING	PHASE ONE	PHASE TWO	PHASE THREE	PHASE FOUR	PHASE FIVE
Discuss heatwave planning and heatwave phases at team meetings leading up to summer. Heat Management Procedures for each to department to be revised as per business continuity plan and OHS (Occupational Health and Safety). Once reviewed, these procedures to be communicated with staff prior to summer. Identify capacity for supporting organisation wide business continuity. Continue with OHS Committees. Communicate with staff the effects of heatwaves and coping strategies to implement.	Implement communication strategy. Manager/coordinator to communicate to all staff the heatwave threat on the same business day of receiving the heat health warning message.	Manager/ Coordinator to monitor council officers and resources and implement coping strategies. Communicate flexible working hours available, where appropriate Provide resources across the organisation for business continuity. Provide organisational support to undertake heatwave actions. Continue to monitor high risk clients. Staff should drink adequate amounts of water and keep hydrated.	Manager/ Coordinator to monitor council officers and resources and implement coping strategies. Implementation of flexible working arrangements where appropriate. Monitor office resources to ensure core business functions are being met. Provide organisational support to undertake heatwave actions and ensure core business functions are delivered. Consider implementation of changes in service delivery where staff working through the heat of the day.	Continue to monitor staff and ensure heatwave coping strategies are providing relief. Ensure business continuity through flexible working hours where appropriate. Allow council officers with at risk family members to work from home where appropriate. Implementation of changes in service delivery where appropriate. Continue adequate information supply and communication to both internal and external organisations.	Managers inform team members and coordinators of a decrease in temperature and return and debrief where appropriate. Identify and review the effectiveness of the Heatwave Action Plan and revise where appropriate. Consider adequacy of service delivery and identify service gaps for future changes.

MERRI-BEK CITY COUNCIL – OUTDOOR STAFF					
PLANNING	PHASE ONE	PHASE TWO	PHASE THREE	PHASE FOUR	PHASE FIVE
Discuss heatwave planning and heatwave phases at team meetings leading up to summer. Provide a safe and healthy work environment. Implement and ensure compliance with OHS policies and procedures (personal protective equipment, first aid kits, drink bottles, sun protection etc.). Periodically review the work area of employees and their work procedures. Continue with OHS Committees. Issue all staff with Heat Management Procedure. Develop specific alternative duties for staff working during a declared heatwave. Assign Team Leaders and coordinators the responsibility for monitoring weather conditions. Provide Emergency Contact lists for all vehicles. Update staff manuals and ensure resources are adequately stocked.	Implement communication strategy. Issue staff email to advise we are approaching heatwave in the next 1-7 days.	Issue staff email to advise of the Heat Health Warning for the next 1-2 days. Ensure all staff have PPE, sun protection and adequate drinking liquids. Consider implementation of changes in service delivery where appropriate Continue to monitor clients at increased risk.	Issue staff email to advise we are in a heatwave for the next 3-4 days. Ensure all staff have PPE, sun protection and adequate drinking liquids. Implement alternative duties where appropriate. Consider implementation of changes in service delivery where appropriate.	Issue staff email to advise we are in a heatwave for the next 4 or more days. Ensure all staff have adequate PPE, sun protection and drinking liquids. Implement alternative duties where appropriate. Consider implementation of changes in service delivery where appropriate.	Email to all staff advising them that temperatures have decreased and return to normal working duties. Conduct department debrief ensuring all resources used during heatwave are replenished. Identify and review the effectiveness of the Heatwave Action Plan and revise where appropriate. Consider adequacy of service delivery and identify service gaps for future changes.

Communications

The key purpose of extreme heat communications is to support and improve community resilience to extreme heat conditions.

State Government

The Department of Health has the lead responsibility for preparing messages and general information about management in an extreme heat event. Fact sheets are provided on the Department's website and the Better Health Channel website. A media toolkit has been prepared for local government. This toolkit comprises a range of electronic documents that can be used to ensure media releases are localised.

Health advice and warning messages relating to extreme heat events are prepared by the Chief Health Officer and disseminated by Department of Health, the Bureau of Meteorology, Ambulance Victoria, service providers, health professionals and local media. Relevant Community Groups are encouraged to subscribe to the Department of Health heat alert emails.

In addition to the ongoing communications tasks, the Merri-bek City Council Communications Unit undertakes campaigns for Facebook, X/Twitter and Council's website to ensure that key messages can continue to be accessed by members of the community. Following are links to relevant resources:

Extreme Heat and Heatwaves

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat>

Heat Resources

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heatwave-community-resources>

Survive the Heat - campaigns

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/campaigns/survive-the-heat>

Bureau of Meteorology – Heatwave Knowledge Centre

[BoM Heatwave Knowledge Centre](#)

Food Safety after Power Outages

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/files/collections/factsheets/p/power-outages-food-safety-after-a-power-failure.pdf>

Merri-bek City Council Communications

Council acts as a supporting agency to assist in the localised dissemination of advice and warnings. The key aim during a heatwave will be to communicate to the community the potential for hot days which may affect health and well-being and how to prepare for the event. Communication responsibilities include:

- Staff and community receive timely and accurate information about heatwaves.
- Staff receive guidelines about heatwave practices and occupational health and safety information.
- Communications remain aligned with Victorian and National communications.

Key Messages

Everyone can be affected by heat in different ways, but there are several groups in the community who are more susceptible to prolonged extreme heat. The following outlines a variety of options that can be shared with Merri-bek residents and staff to build awareness of extreme heat:

Encourage people to consider how extreme heat could affect their daily activities by planning for:

- losses of electricity
- disruptions to public transport
- school and/or workplace closures
- adverse health impacts experienced by them or someone they know

Encourage people to keep out of the heat by:

- Planning their day in a way that allows them to stay out of the heat.
- Ahead of hotter weather, buy a few extra items to make sure they have enough food at home to last over the hot period.
- Avoiding unnecessary travel
- Paying bills online or over the phone.
- Staying indoors or in the shade during the hottest part of the day.
- Undertaking unavoidable strenuous activities like sport, home improvements or gardening during the coolest parts of the day such as early morning.
- If outside activities are essential – stay in the shade, wear hat and light-coloured, loose-fitting clothes, preferably made of natural fibres, wear sunglasses, apply sunscreen with a sun protection factor of 30 to exposed skin and take plenty of drinking water with them.
- Ensure their pets or companion animals are also well hydrated and have plenty of shade when they are outside.

Encourage people to stay cool by:

- Looking at the things they can do to make their home cooler. E.g., installing or upgrading roof insulation, awnings, shade clothes or external blinds on the sides of their house facing the sun.
- Staying in the coolest rooms of the house.
- Reducing heat from sunlight entering through windows by using external shades or light-coloured curtains.
- Using an air-conditioner, evaporative cooler, or fan.
- Having their air-conditioner serviced before summer.
- Having an alternate way to cool their home available if their electricity fails during a heatwave.
- Ensuring there is sufficient air circulation, either from an air conditioner or by leaving a secured window or door open
- Taking cool showers and splashing themselves several times a day with cold water, particularly focusing on their face and back of neck. Wearing a loose, cotton, damp cloth, or scarf on the back of their neck can also help them to stay cool.
- Going to an air-conditioned building in their local area to cool off (see below list for options)
- Place feet in a bucket of cold water

Merri-bek's communication strategy for extreme heat has four phases:

- Pre-summer
- During summer
- Heat Health Warning and forecast extreme heat/heatwave (7 days prior to the event)
- Declared heatwave

Communication Strategy

STAGE	ACTION	TASK/STRATEGY	RESPONSIBILITY
Pre-summer	Prepare heat information and promotional material to address the needs of the Merri-bek community.	- Review existing materials including; - Better Health Channel - Extreme heat - Better Health Channel - BoM Heatwave Knowledge Centre: http://www.bom.gov.au/australia/heatwave/knowledge-centre/ - Prepare any additional resources, including translations - Work across council to identify community groups and leaders to disseminate information. - Ensure identified people at increased risk have access to information that is relevant and meets community needs.	Emergency Management Coordinator Communications Team
	Educate the community about heat.	- Disseminate information via Council publications, websites, and socials. - Update any community or agency registers - Conduct information sessions for community groups about heat with the following networks: - Family Violence Prevention Network - Glenroy and Fawkner Service Provider Network - Neighbourhood Houses - Disability Service Provider Network - Multicultural and Settlement Services Provider Network - Interfaith Network - Community Connectors - Seniors Social Groups - Provide access to resources and education material on heat that are relevant, translated, and accessible to different cohorts of the community. - Liaise with other stakeholders to ensure consistency and interoperability of extreme heat messaging and activity - Prepare or revise key health messages. - Provide information to service users – libraries, aquatic and leisure centres, community venues	Emergency Management Coordinator Communications Community Development and Social Policy, working with service provider networks Aged and Community Support Libraries Aquatics and Leisure Services

STAGE	ACTION	TASK/STRATEGY	RESPONSIBILITY
		• Provide information to service areas – Aged Care, MCH etc. to share with clients and service users. Assist identified people at increased risk in developing health and personal emergency plans. •	
	Provide information and advice to mitigate the impacts of climate change.	• Work with the Sustainability and Climate Team to inform the community of programs for retrofitting homes, solar etc.	Climate Resilience Lead Emergency Management Coordinator
	Provide information to staff about heat and its impacts.	• Heat Management Procedure • Team meeting discussions • Grapevine posts • Provide information around heat stress, heat stroke etc. • Provide information on keeping cool, use of sunscreen etc.	All organisation
During Summer	Promote and provide key heat health messages to the community	Promote heat health messages through internal and external communications channels (e.g., newsletters, meetings)	Communications
	Educate parents of young children about effects of hot weather on children	• Discuss at MCH visits and new parents' groups. • Display posters and distribute brochures at MCH centres, Youth Centres, Community Centres and Libraries etc., • Distribute information via socials, websites, newsletters etc.	MCH staff Youth Centre staff Communications
	Educate older adults regarding the effects of heatwaves	• Display information at Seniors Centre's • Discuss during service provision from Aged Services, Meal Delivery and Community Transport • Aged Care Newsletter • Distribute information via socials, website etc.	Aged and Community Support
Heatwave Forecast (up to 7 days prior to forecast event)	Alert people to forecast Heat Health Warning / Heatwave	• Email to all internal staff and key external stakeholders.	Emergency Management/MRM
		• Alert to managers and coordinators as to warnings	HR and Safety and Wellbeing leads
		• Assess outdoor events and contingency plans	Festivals Team
		• Internal staff to forward alert to their stakeholders (e.g., Sporting Clubs, Seniors Clubs, Childcare Centres)	Coordinators/Team Leaders

STAGE	ACTION	TASK/STRATEGY	RESPONSIBILITY
		Each departmental lead to email staff with information and advice on working in the heat	Coordinators/Team Leaders
		Contact known at risk service users and groups to inform them of the alert	Relevant lead
		Information to be displayed on website, socials, and other forms of media.	Communications
		Information to be displayed on Grapevine.	Communications
During Declared Heatwave	Alert people to the severe or extreme heat conditions and provide information on appropriate behaviour	- Display severe or extreme heat warnings on website, socials etc. - Information on staying cool to be provided to outdoor staff to assist people experiencing homelessness. - Refer people experiencing homelessness to relevant services. - Display Heat Health Warnings in key public places (e.g., Council foyers, libraries, and childcare centres) - Update information on opening hours of community centres and aquatic facilities via socials and website. - Update (if possible) areas which may have been affected by power shedding.	Communications Hot Spots group/internal working group on Homelessness
		Welfare check to known service users (via telephone) who may be at risk.	Aged Services/Community engagement Maternal and Child Health
		Continue to update staff on services and keeping safe in the heat.	HR and Safety

Community Support and Recovery

Any relief and recovery assistance required following an extreme heat event will be managed using the relief and recovery arrangements documented in the City of Merri-bek Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP), and Relief and Recovery Plan.

Council will also endeavour to assist the community in dealing with the psychological effects of the heatwave, i.e., loss of loved ones, disruption to work and life, fear and anxiety caused by the heatwave etc., and provide information to the community on action to prevent subsequent heat related illness.

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