

Energy Efficiency and Literacy Workshops Pilot Program

Background

Heat is the leading cause of death among climate-related disasters in Australia, and in the past decade, 50% of all heat-related deaths occurred in Victoria. Heatwaves can cause severe health impacts, including dehydration, heatstroke, and increased mortality, particularly among groups experiencing systemic disadvantage such as older adults, people with chronic illnesses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability, refugee and migrant communities, those experiencing homelessness, and individuals without access to adequate cooling.

These risks are compounded by the fact that Australia ranks among the worst Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for household energy efficiency, limiting people's ability to keep their homes safe during extreme heat. Capacity building in household energy efficiency and literacy (understanding and reducing electricity and gas bills) improves community mental and physical wellbeing by enhancing thermal comfort in homes and reducing financial stress through lower energy costs.

Collaborative activities

- Capacity building workshops were developed targeting priority communities, they included a brief contextualisation of energy efficiency and literacy within the broader theme of climate change and health, highlighting the mental and physical health impacts of being unable to keep homes cool during summer.
- Each workshop was capped at 15–20 participants to ensure diverse needs could be met and sufficient time was available to analyse electricity and gas bills.
- Engagement with stakeholders, including neighbourhood houses, disability services, and a community health service as trusted connectors with target communities to promote and support the workshops.
- Facilitation of consultations between Enviroshop energy efficiency and literacy consultants, stakeholders, and community to refine content and delivery of the workshops and communications.
- Support of one co-design session with the disability community to develop content, delivery format and communications were appropriate for the specific disability audience.
- Five workshops were delivered, four in partnership with neighbourhood houses in Kerang, Cohuna, Wedderburn, and Pyramid Hill, and one with Golden City Support Services for the disability community.
- 6 month review sessions were held with workshop attendees to evaluate their longer-term impacts and identify further gaps.

At a glance outcomes

- Improved knowledge about reducing electricity and gas bills and low/no cost measures to improving the energy efficiency of homes.
- Immediate financial savings on electricity and gas bills of up to \$900.



Enviroshop workshop facilitator



Kerang Neighbourhood House workshop
checking electricity bills

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**Heat is the biggest killer of the
climate disasters in Australia.**

Outcomes achieved

A total of 54 participants took part across all 5 workshops. All 32 participants who completed the evaluations felt the workshop was of practical help.

Respondents indicated an average score of 4.2 out of 5 when asked how much the workshop had improved knowledge about reducing electricity and gas bills, changing bill plans and low/no cost measures to improving the energy efficiency of their home.

In addition to this there were:

- Significant immediate savings on the initial assessment of electricity and gas bills ranging from around \$200 to \$900
- Better understanding of the barriers to better heating and cooling of homes
- Better understanding of financial and health benefits of transitioning off gas
- Improved relationships with stakeholders and other organisations to build collective action and capacity



Participants at the Wedderburn
Neighbourhood House workshop

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“Very practical session, now I have to act”

Post workshop actions

After the workshops were completed there were a number of actions that further embedded project findings and impacts:

- LMPHU connected with Climate Justice, the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action (DEECA) and One Million Homes Alliance to look to improve compliance with new rental energy efficiency standards, including addressing inequity in access to affordable renewable energy.
- Shared workshop findings with Victorian Council Of Social Services (VCOSS) Health and Energy Nexus Project
- Linked stakeholders and participants including Golden City Support Services with further information on housing justice for tenants rights including Loddon Campaspe Housing Justice, and with Anglicare Victoria Energy Assistance Programme
- Cohuna Neighbourhood House (NH) developed a one pager on energy efficiency and reducing your electricity and gas bills tips as part of their NH newsletter.



Golden City Support Services staff at workshop

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**I understand power bills and have
confidence to question bills and
plans**

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**The workshop addressed the needs of
people who are among the most
disadvantaged by current energy policy
- Golden City Support Services**

Learnings and recommendations

Attendees rated the following as their highest home heating and cooling challenges:

- Cost of electricity / gas (highest concern)
- Reliability of service (i.e. older systems / gas & electricity interruptions)
- Cost of maintenance and system upgrades / retrofitting
- Understanding how to find the best energy provider to suit needs
- Low home energy efficiency
- Renting making it harder to retrofit / install solar
- Very few participants understood their bills and or felt confident to navigate changing their bill plan indicating there is a significant need for continued energy efficiency and literacy capacity building.
- Working with trusted connectors such as neighbourhood houses and other community services, optimised workshop attendance.
- Current electricity and gas energy systems compound inequity e.g. there is inequity in access to affordable renewable energy systems particularly for renters.
- Regional/rural communities don't have the same access to energy efficient resources or services as metro communities. e.g. local companies/businesses who are registered to implement Victorian Energy Upgrade (VEU) upgrades are not as accessible in regional areas.
- The prevalence of energy efficiency resource scammers adds confusion to understanding of the energy system.
- Participants feared power outages, lack of power security if they transition off gas, more frequent in regional/rural area.



Northern District Community Health staff member assists in reading an electricity bill



Cohuna Neighbourhood House workshop

Recommendations

- Continue community education on energy efficiency and basic assessment of electricity and gas bills.
- Consider a 'train the trainer' model on household energy efficiency and basic assessment of electricity and gas bill to embed knowledge in communities.
- Development of regional/rural nodal points of energy efficiency and literacy expertise including training more tradies with energy efficiency and energy transition expertise and/or engage local navigators to assist with contacting energy retailer and change of gas and electricity bill plan.
- Develop energy systems with objectives that hold providers and retailers accountable including considerations of social equity and consumer rights.

Next steps

Thanks to the Violet Vines Marshmann grant through La Trobe University, the LMPHU will be able to continue and expand the implementation of energy efficiency and literacy workshops pilot programme for target populations across the Loddon Mallee.

Sources:

[Heat health risk | Australian Climate Service](#)

[Heatwave fatalities in Australia: a new analysis - Risk Frontiers](#)

[Climate Control News | Australia ranks worst for energy efficiency in developed world](#)



Wedderburn Community Centre workshop