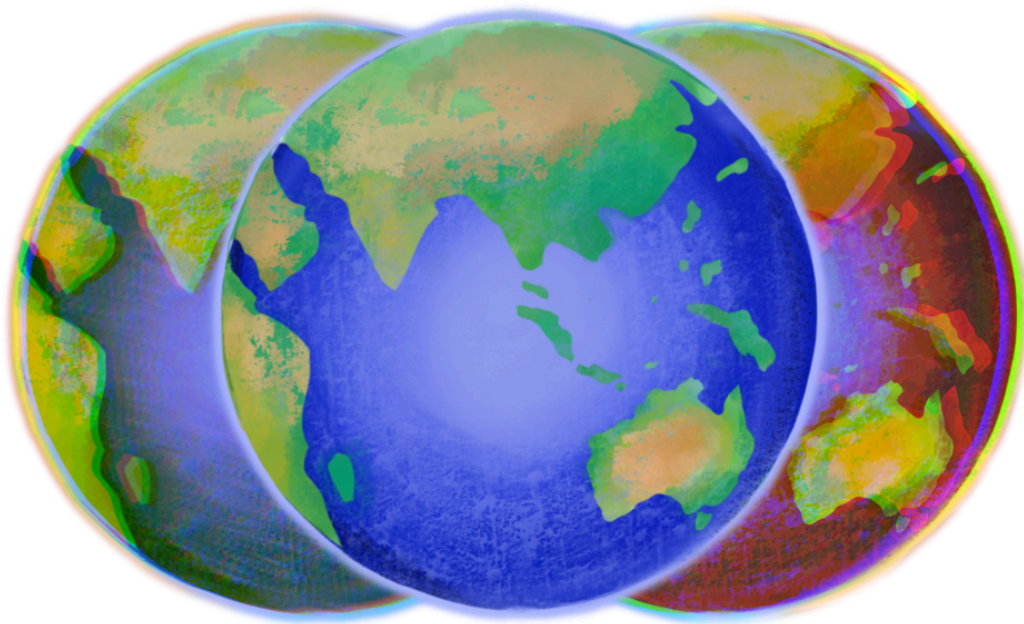


HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, & CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNITY VOICES



HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, & CLIMATE CHANGE

"It takes every ounce of your energy to think about where you're going to sleep safely, where you're gonna be able to get a drink somewhere, if you're going to be able to eat - all that survival stuff just takes over your whole life, and you really can't function beyond that."

This document comes from community yarns in 2023 and 2024 which were co-designed with colleagues who themselves had experienced homelessness and who provide support to those currently on the streets.

We chose to work with people 'in recovery' and people with whom we had existing relationships, who already had support systems in place, and who had experience sharing their lived experience of homelessness to guide policy and practice. We also invited people experiencing poverty who had previously been involved in climate justice activity.

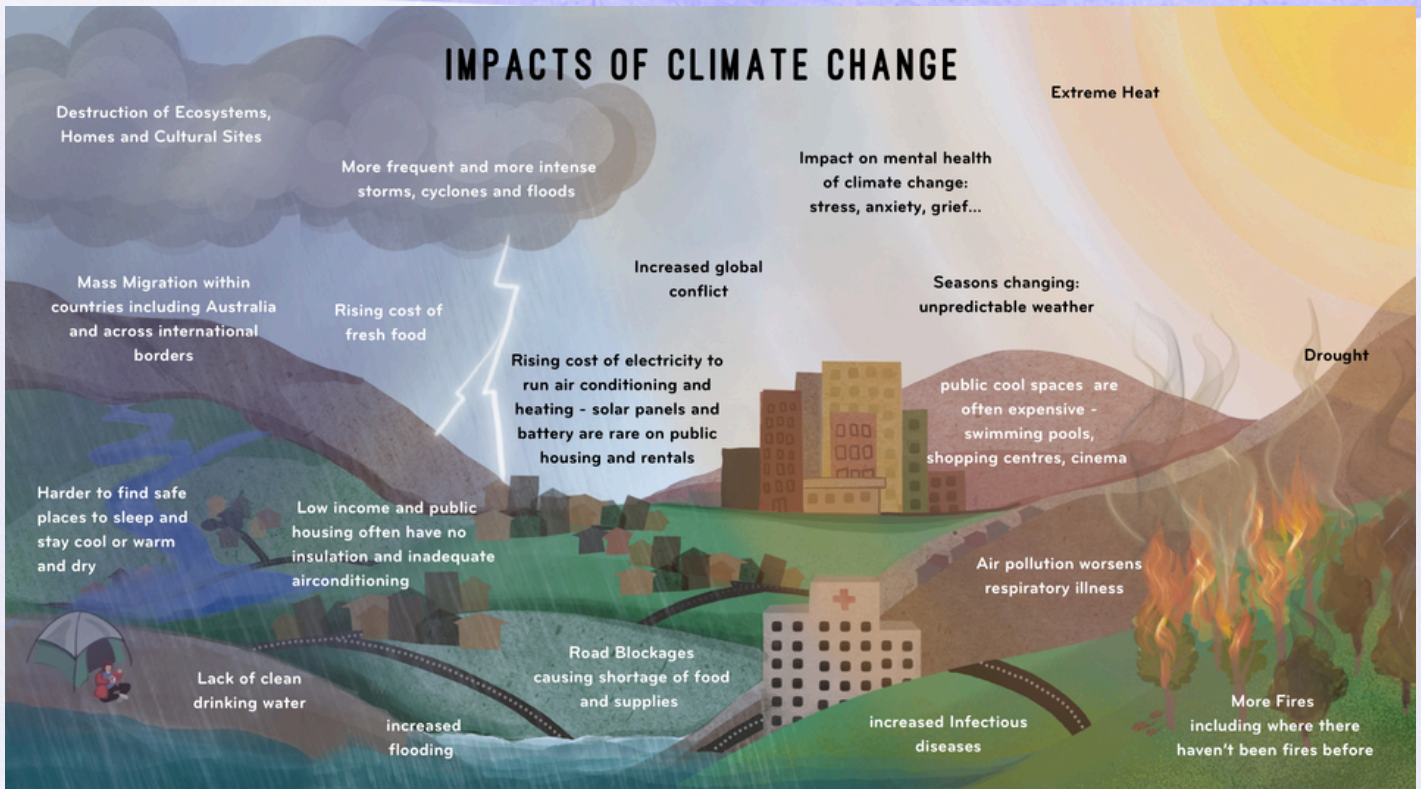
This small group of people included many intersecting diversities and structural disadvantages, including other groups consulted within this program of work. Many had experienced homelessness and poverty as young people. Some had significant health and mental health concerns, 2 people lived regionally and most had been impacted by drug and alcohol abuse (not always their own). The group had much to contribute, identifying barriers to climate adaptation for those experiencing homelessness and poverty, as well as offering solutions. Their generosity was humbling.

BARRIERS TO CLIMATE ADAPTATION FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY:



"This is the first time I've ever thought of (my lived experience) as being worth something. Because there's always been like my experience in life as a black fella, there's always people are speaking for us and doing for us. So we haven't really had a say. And I'm just realising that I've never thought my lived experiences were worth anything."

HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, & CLIMATE CHANGE



PEOPLES EXPERIENCES OF CLIMATE INJUSTICE:



HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, & CLIMATE CHANGE

DAY-TO-DAY SURVIVAL ALREADY AN ALL-CONSUMING TASK

"The kind of dilemma is how do we keep people alive now, because people are dying every week on the streets. In order to be ready when things get worse, you have to realise that people have got no shelter from the rain, or the heat...and there's no relief from that."

"Poverty is a significant vulnerability, reducing people's ability to plan, engage in thinking beyond today, have fuel in the car, spare food in the fridge, to adapt. Poverty is a significant factor across many communities, needing systemic responses."

"Every year I dread summer, every damn year, because I don't have air con. The house that I live in is horrible. It doesn't help that I'm sick...you can't go sleep outside because you're worried that someone's going to come and hurt you. That's something that we used to always go sleep outside"

"Mental health problems and physical health problems, and how alcohol and other drug problems are very disjointed as systems...that has had an impact on me"

"We need to consider the affordability of maintaining heating and cooling as well. Because I know people that have air conditioning that have never run it, because they can't afford to."

"Specifically talking about heat, I don't leave the house in summer, I actually just can't, I can't go out - I can't socialise."

"People who are in that state of distress, cannot articulate that because it's like that language gap...because their trauma and their survival instincts have kicked in"

FEAR ABOUT FUTURE SURVIVAL

"I get so scared, depressed about now and in the future about what's going to happen to us. And it really affects me... I just hope that I don't lose hope.., that's my worry"

"...it's eating, keeping your food cold, if you can't make ice or don't have a fridge you're gonna have to get food practically every day. And some of us aren't able to do that."

HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, & CLIMATE CHANGE

"What I've noticed... in this sector is that sometimes people are ready to talk, but the people who need to listen are not ready to listen."

OFTEN FORGOTTEN/EXCLUDED FROM POLICY AND SERVICES

"There's tons of Bush camps, in regional areas and out of suburbs...there's people living in the bushes at the beach. You see that every day. Who knows about them?"

"Any of that stuff that we need to do is not being done, and nobody seems to give a shit."

"Consider the solar industry, where subsidies were given, but the only people that could access those subsidies are people who own the home and had cash...Now that electricity has risen in price, beyond inflationary forces. And it's once again, the people that are most in need of support that are affected the most by the inflation."

CRITICAL LACK OF ESSENTIAL RESOURCES AND SERVICES

"When we had that cyclone here - they had an evacuation centre here, but it was pretty much for the people that was hit up north. Where the cyclone hit directly, they weren't leaving their houses. So the evacuation centre had pretty much the people that were living on the streets anyway"

"During COVID, the government made accommodation available on a short term basis for people who didn't have homes... and then those emergency services are taken away...these basic human human needs are provided in an emergency state only. Some resources that are needed in emergencies, are actually needed for some people all the time."

SYSTEMS ALREADY STRUGGLING WITH NON-CLIMATE ISSUES

"With the healthcare system crumbling, if we have one single environmental crises, the way that affects us getting our treatment, our mental health and puts us at greater risk of not being able to survive future environmental crises and weather events."

EXACERBATE EXISTING SERVICE GAPS AND VULNERABILITIES

"Need to make sure we've got a plan together before things get worse... really understanding the lived experience expertise of those who are going to be impacted because they already are impacted by those gaps."

"I tend to advocate for people and try and battle the system to get them what they need. Which is pretty exhausting a lot of the time, but I'm very conscious of that, you know, the vulnerable people in society that fall through the gaps."

"A few years ago, I was diagnosed with mental health disorder, it's a very common one, and easy to treat...but it is incredibly common in Australia, and the majority of people do not have the money to get that diagnosis...Getting a diagnosis has facilitated my ability to rejoin the community when I was actually somewhat at risk of just leaving the community and isolating big time...and so this is a fundamental gateway for people to recover into society."

ACKNOWLEDGE EXPERTISE & KNOWLEDGE FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE

"When at tent city, we had a lot of us around the circle, yarning about decisions, about how we were going to get along and eventually it was the people in tent city who were running tent city...those were skills in the community and are in the community but they are not necessarily there when the government says here have these things"

SOLUTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

"Greater integration of various health and social services, being able to go somewhere for something specific and have access to a holistic team that are addressing all of your needs, and not sort of just being handled between services"

"The other thing that I would say is peer workers at every door...helping people realise that they are not alone in their unique lived experience or the health experience. Having these workers the front of health and social services will help that communication barrier between someone trained in a biomedical model of health, or specific service delivery and people with lived experience"

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1** As with all groups CJU have worked with it is recognised that people need to have their health and social needs met now. Not only does this enable adaptive capacity it also enables people to prepare for increased climate impacts. This needs to include: housing, healthcare, heating and cooling, food security, clean and accessible water, increased financial benefits, dignity and respect.
- 2** People with unmet needs require supportive and dignified case management - 'no wrong door' policies need to be effectively implemented in all health services.
- 3** Employing peer workers in all frontline service areas was suggested as an effective way to reduce the difficulty of engaging with services staffed by people with no lived experience of poverty or homelessness.
- 4** A significant increase in climate resilient social housing, with attention to building in areas that are relatively low risk for floods, fire, rising sea levels and other hazards related to a changing climate. This housing needs to be provided where it is needed, across regions and communities.

To enable this to happen significant reform is required regarding:

- the residential tenancy act (having a home is a human right and the priorities of the renters need to outweigh the priorities of 'investors')
- our taxation system
- holiday rentals and Air BnB
- empty dwellings
- rental prices and rental caps

Whilst we acknowledge these reforms sit outside of the remit of many health and social services, we recognise that these sectors have a significant role to play in advocating that these issues be appropriately addressed.

"Nobody across this state should be living below the 'poverty line'."

IN CLOSING

With global temperatures at record highs, communities facing increasingly frequent, cascading disasters, and our social, economic and political systems needing to adapt to climate-related risks, good policy and service provision is of the utmost priority. Policy and practice need to be well-informed, proactive and effective so that its impact positively transforms our systems to support all members of our communities to become resilient to the challenges and disruptions brought by climate and environmental change.

Bringing community members and people with lived experience into policy and service provision spaces and redistributing decision-making power to them is a crucial part of achieving good outcomes. Community members have essential knowledge of local socio-political realities, including community needs, power dynamics, communication pathways and sources of vulnerability. When empowered to be part of policy (and practice) community members can ensure activities are informed by local knowledge and designed in accordance with local priorities. Community participation also fosters community buy-in. Inclusion not only supports the implementation process for policy and practices, but it can redress a long and complex history of oppressive and patronising interactions between government departments, service providers and communities. While community participation in the policy space alone will not rectify this history, it is an important first step.

Best-practice community participation means community-led policy making. This demands radical change in core processes and practices within the policy space, and an increased awareness of equity and inclusion. Well-resourced, inclusive participatory processes must be adopted across the policy design, implementation and review cycle, redistributing power back to people in the community so that they can engage with policy-makers and service providers on equitable terms, and can lead change in their own communities. In this sense, community-led policy making is an imperative for both good policy, just climate adaptation and social justice.

Many community members are keen to continue these conversations with each other, and within their wider communities. This is significant given the difficult topics we discussed. The understandings we began to build during time together continue to develop. Ideas have a safe and collaborative place to grow. Further visual communication is taking shape. Collaborations are being planned. This is a beginning.

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We recognise their People, their Cultures, their land and waters, their Elders past and present.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES WERE THE FIRST SOVEREIGN NATIONS OF THIS CONTINENT AND ITS ADJACENT ISLANDS. THIS SOVEREIGNTY HAS NEVER BEEN CEDED.

The content shared in this report remains the collective property of the communities who created it.

At any time those members of the community can request edits or removal of the stories and words they have shared. These are their stories, experiences, and knowings. It is the responsibility of policy makers to hear and act on their calls for transformative, just, and collaborative policy responses.

We are listening, observing, and learning.

