

2020 Challenge Climate Champion Case Study - Leadership
Kooweerup Regional Health Service (KRHS)

GGHH Agenda Goals

- **Leadership**

2020 Challenge Climate Champion Awards

- **Climate Leadership (Gold)**
- **Climate Resiliency (Silver)**

Hospital Goal

- **Improve resiliency to extreme weather events**
- **Promote regional policies to protect people and the environment from climate change**
- **Educate staff and patients on climate change and mitigation strategies**

Progress Achieved

- Improved knowledge and readiness among staff and patients to cope with local extreme weather events.
- Improved health service preparedness and capacity to respond to environmental and climate change.
- Increased social connectedness and outcomes through community engagement activities.
- Improved knowledge of decision-makers and stakeholders in health and social services regarding the health impacts of climate change and climate adaptation strategies, through contributing to an Australian publication on the topic.

The Issue

Koo Wee Rup in Victoria, Australia, is a vulnerable community for floods, grass fires, heatwaves and storms. It is located at the head of Westernport Bay and is on reclaimed marshland, drained by large drains and rivers which crisscross the location. Mosquitos are prevalent throughout the year.



It is also one of the fastest growing urban communities in Victoria, with areas North and South predominantly rural. Climate change and other environmental challenges, such as loss of arable and pastoral land, and increased use of pesticides, have had significant impacts on the community and their way of life.

KRHS recognizes that climate change will increase the frequency, duration and intensity of extreme weather in the region, as well as risks from coastal inundation. This increase in extreme weather will affect the health and wellbeing of the local community, and potentially impact the infrastructure and service provision of KRHS itself.

Sustainability Strategy Implemented

Kooweerup Regional Health Service (KRHS) has taken a proactive lead on building resilience within its organisation and among the local community, as well as advocating for climate adaptation policies more broadly at state and national levels by:

- Analysing local disaster risks due to climate change
- Adopting policies to address local disaster risks due to climate change
- Engaging with Local Government, health and environmental agencies, to invest in climate mitigation and adaptation programs to protect and promote environmental and human health.
- Educating staff, patients and the community on solutions to environmental sustainability issues connected to climate change
- Advocating for policies at local, state and national levels that addresses climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies for rural and regional health services in Australia.

Implementation process

The KRHS is one of the first health services in Victoria working to address climate change as a significant global health issue, and to integrate Health Promotion and Environmental Sustainability based on a socio-ecological model of health.

KRHS' Health Promotion team plays an important role in integrating health promotion into its practices, educating the public and decision-makers on the health impacts of climate change and the solutions to these issues, and advocating for protective policies to protect public health from climate change.

Local partnerships with environment, government, education and health agencies enable the KRHS to work collaboratively and invest in climate mitigation and adaptation programs to protect and promote health. Key objectives are:

1. Increase action to promote awareness of human health being central to climate change action and environmental sustainability
2. Increase health service capacity to respond to environmental and climate change adaptation through integration of systems across the health service.
3. Improve preparedness in relation to the issues of climate change at a local level.
4. To increase community resilience by increasing awareness, skills and actions of staff, patients and the community to learn and adapt to climate change.
5. To further build resources of the Hewitt Eco-house to improve climate readiness in the community.

Staff/Physicians/Nurses

All the staff/Physicians/Nurses, student placements and contractors to Kooweerup Regional Health Service are taken through an induction process that includes a focus on environmental sustainability practices conducted onsite. A bi-monthly newsletter, posters, emails, meetings and leaflets keep staff informed and aware of climate change initiatives, impacts and strategies. Staff can complete an environmental pledge to support their contribution to environmental sustainability both at work and at home.

Patients

KRHS has a number of long term residents who have access to all the gardens, the Men's Shed and all workshops that cover a wide variety of subjects. Environmental Sustainability is embedded in many of the themes. Education focusing on healthy solutions to problems connected to climate change is a regular feature. Environmental Sustainability and Health Promotion practitioners hold workshops in the onsite Hewitt Eco-house. Patients are notified by a newsletter, word of mouth, flyers and social media.

Community

KRHS Community Engagement policy recognises the importance of having regular and ongoing communication with its community and stakeholders. Engaging with the community to influence more sustainable and health promoting behaviour is essential. It also enables meaningful input into decision forming processes through well planned, inclusive, responsive and accessible community engagement. The Health Promotion Communication Officer regularly updates and contributes educational information relating to climate change health initiatives to a variety of external newspapers, newsletters and social network systems. Examples include the KRHS Facebook page, School newsletters, local Council events pages, The Herald Sun and Leader Newspapers, Church groups, etc.

Primary and secondary school students, youth groups and a variety of community groups regularly visit the Hewitt Eco-house. Information is on-hand on the form of brochures that relate to different solutions to problems affected by climate change. Examples include District Nursing, Flood Readiness Checklist, Bush-fire Readiness and Extreme Heat Dangers. The house also has an interactive touch screen that includes messages concerning environmental degradation, waste impacts, water management with solutions and links to useful information.

Decision makers

Local Government

- Presentations and collaboration with Cardinia Shire Council Officers.
- The KRHS participates in seminars and conferences in collaboration with the Local Council to promote and enhance policy development to address impacts of climate change at the state level.

State Government

- Gippsland Health Promotion Conference - key speaker.
- Presentations to Health Service Executives and Hospital Board members, Strategic Coordinators – Department of Sustainability, Department of Water Environment Land and Planning
- State ministers Daniel Andrews and Mary Anne Thomas have inspected the Hewitt Eco-house, the Community Garden and the hospital buildings.
- The Health Promotion Manager is actively involved in communicating with State leaders about the causes of climate change and the importance of protective policies.
- The Health Promotion team have advocated for staff superannuation funds to transition to renewable energy investment and away from fossil fuel investments.

National Government Level

- The Health Promotion team has engaged in numerous conference presentations and meetings with Ministers to continue to discuss the ongoing work, education and initiatives being conducted at KRHS and to advocate for a continued focus on such an important topic.
- The KRHS has met with the (former) Environment Minister Greg Hunt and (former) Health Minister David Davis, to enhance understanding and to advocate for a mandated policy that addresses climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies for all Regional Hospitals in Australia.
- The Health Promotion Manager has contributed to an important resource that informs all interested parties including National Decision Makers regarding the expected impacts of Climate Change on Australian communities. (Walker & Mason eds) 2015, 'Climate Change Adaptation for Health and Social Services', CSIRO Publishing, Australia). Other initiatives include gathering of evidenced based data to support the work conducted at KRHS.

Tracking Progress

We evaluated our initiatives using formal and informal interviews, group discussions, participant surveys, pre- and post-workshops, and organisational audits. Our success is measured by the benefits that have been identified as a result of these initiatives. Case studies such as this enable tracking and documentation of progress towards organisational sustainability.

Challenges and lessons learned

Some factors contributing to the success of our strategies are:

- Having strong and clear leadership from the CEO and board of the KRHS
- The employment of a full-time Health Promotion practitioner leading a Health Promotion team
- Staff engagement from all departments across the organisation



Challenges:

- To enable continued staff engagement by building it into core business is a work in progress
- Gaining support from senior staff who are often dealing with competing priorities
- Enabling workshops and programs to be delivered with little or no additional funding particularly for staff is extremely challenging.
- Keeping up to date with best practice.

Next Steps

Further collaboration with other small rural health services is desirable. A current desk top audit of climate resilience and disaster planning to enable business continuity planning will be undertaken in 2017. The Men's Shed has been successful with a solar grant which will provide energy to a "power up" site for mobility scooters.

Demographic information

Kooweerup Regional Health Services is a small rural public health service located in Koo Wee Rup, Victoria, Australia. We provide a range of acute, community, allied health, and residential services, with medical services provided on our hospital site and district nursing in and around the community of the Shire of Cardinia.

Quotes:

"The hospital has inspired me to have water tanks and solar panels at home; I really want to reduce my footprint." – KRHS **staff member 2016**

"On visiting the Eco-house I was impressed with the window tinting and have installed it in my own home." – KRHS **staff member 2016**

"I think it's wonderful we can go out into the community and pick fresh vegies, I love to pick the cherry tomatoes for my lunch." – KRHS **manager 2016**