

# Engaging communities in climate change adaptation

Helena Bishop, Aileen Thoms and Wendy Mason

## Key points

---

- The core business of health care is to protect human health, treat illness and disease, and promote health and wellbeing.
- The environment is fundamental to people's health and wellbeing, directly and indirectly.
- Climate change is an environmental determinant of health.
- Taking a health promotion approach to climate change can have positive impacts on the lives of those affected by climate change.
- Community organisations are best placed and have a role to play in supporting consumers and communities through climate change.
- Engaging communities in climate change adaptation is vital if any real and lasting change is to be made.

## Introduction

Climate change is affecting human health in multiple ways, both directly, through extreme weather events, food and water insecurity and infectious diseases, and indirectly, through economic instability, migration and as a driver of conflict (Department of Health 2012).

The core business of health care is to protect human health, treat illness and disease, and promote health and wellbeing. This is reflected in international declarations such as the Declaration of the Alma Ata for Primary Health Care (WHO 1978) and the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO 1986), which states that the fundamental prerequisites for good health and wellbeing are a stable ecosystem and sustainable resources. As we gain greater knowledge of the health impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, healthcare agencies are gaining awareness of climate justice and the environmental sustainability agenda.

The individual and community impacts of climate change have been explored in previous chapters but in general terms the impacts include decreased opportunities for social connections, social capital and interaction with nature (Kingsley *et al.* 2009). Climate change will also impact an individual's sense of place, identity and attachment, as well as