

A Human Rights Approach to Adapting to Extreme Heat

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Panel: Health, Wellbeing, and Future Generations - Heat and Extremes

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Griffith University acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pays respect to the Elders, past and present, and extends that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Why take a climate justice approach?

- Climate impacts as a series of shocks and acute stressors.
- Reem Alsalem says *'the most consequential threat multiplier for women and girls, with far-reaching impacts on new and existing forms of gendered inequities'*.
- Climate justice is therefore focused on existing inequality and prevention of further harm to current and future generations, encompasses justice for the natural world.

What are the human rights impacts of extreme heat?

- *Climate change is cruel. While it will be felt everywhere, its most crippling effects will be borne by the world's most vulnerable. We witness every day the impact of climate shocks and environmental degradation on conflict-affected communities. Their ability to adapt is being radically eroded by violence and instability. These shocks cost lives. (ICRC)*

This project will seek to fill a significant gap in how to design feminist, rights-compliant policy interventions for a place-based, community-grounded approach that addresses the need for an emergency and public health response that respects human dignity.

The goal will be to build upon the strengths of women and girls as leaders and doers in their communities to identify ambitious steps towards women-led heat resilience and adaptation.

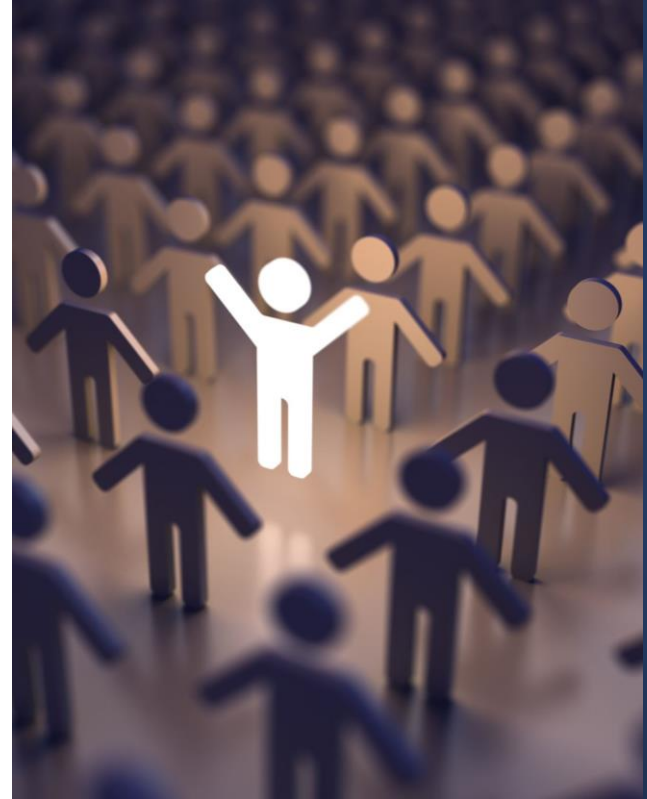
Preventing the gendered impacts of extreme heat

Women and girls are at higher risk during heatwaves for both physiological and social reasons, including insecure housing and work, inequality and unpaid and unrecognised caring responsibilities. However, they are also leaders in resilience and local adaptation to take on the challenges of rising temperatures.

2023 and 2024 have shattered climate records, accompanied by extreme weather that left a trail of devastation and despair. Heat-related deaths are on the rise globally. We know that '[e]xtreme environmental heat leads to heat-related illness and increased population mortality' (Quilty et al 2023). Global evidence demonstrates that lack of adaptation to extreme heat events caused by climate change poses a risk to human rights and social cohesion. And yet, Australian jurisdictions are lagging in terms of planning to prevent injury and death.

Who is vulnerable to extreme heat?

Within the planning and adaptation measures for extreme heat and other climate change driven disasters, the physical and mental vulnerabilities, experiences of discrimination, communication barriers and other increased risks for specific members of the population are often overlooked. These conditions pose serious health risks for older people, outdoor workers, people with chronic conditions, pregnant women, and very young children based on physical vulnerabilities. There are also risks to marginalised people living in poorly insulated housing in urban heat islands or remote communities, prisoners, people with reduced mobility, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, recently arrived refugees, and people experiencing energy poverty or social isolation.



Women's health and climate change.

68% (89) of the 130 studies found that women were more affected by health impacts associated with climate change than men. Sam Sellers. Gender and Climate Change WEDO report 2016.

[GGCA-RP-FINAL.pdf](#)

- **Mortality and reproductive harm from extreme heat events**
- **Increased cancer rates**
- **Increased blood salinity rates**
- **Microplastics**

Abu El Kheir-Mataria Wafa and Chun Sungsoo. Climate change and women's cancer in the MENA region: assessing temperature-related health impacts. Frontiers in Public Health Volume 13 2025

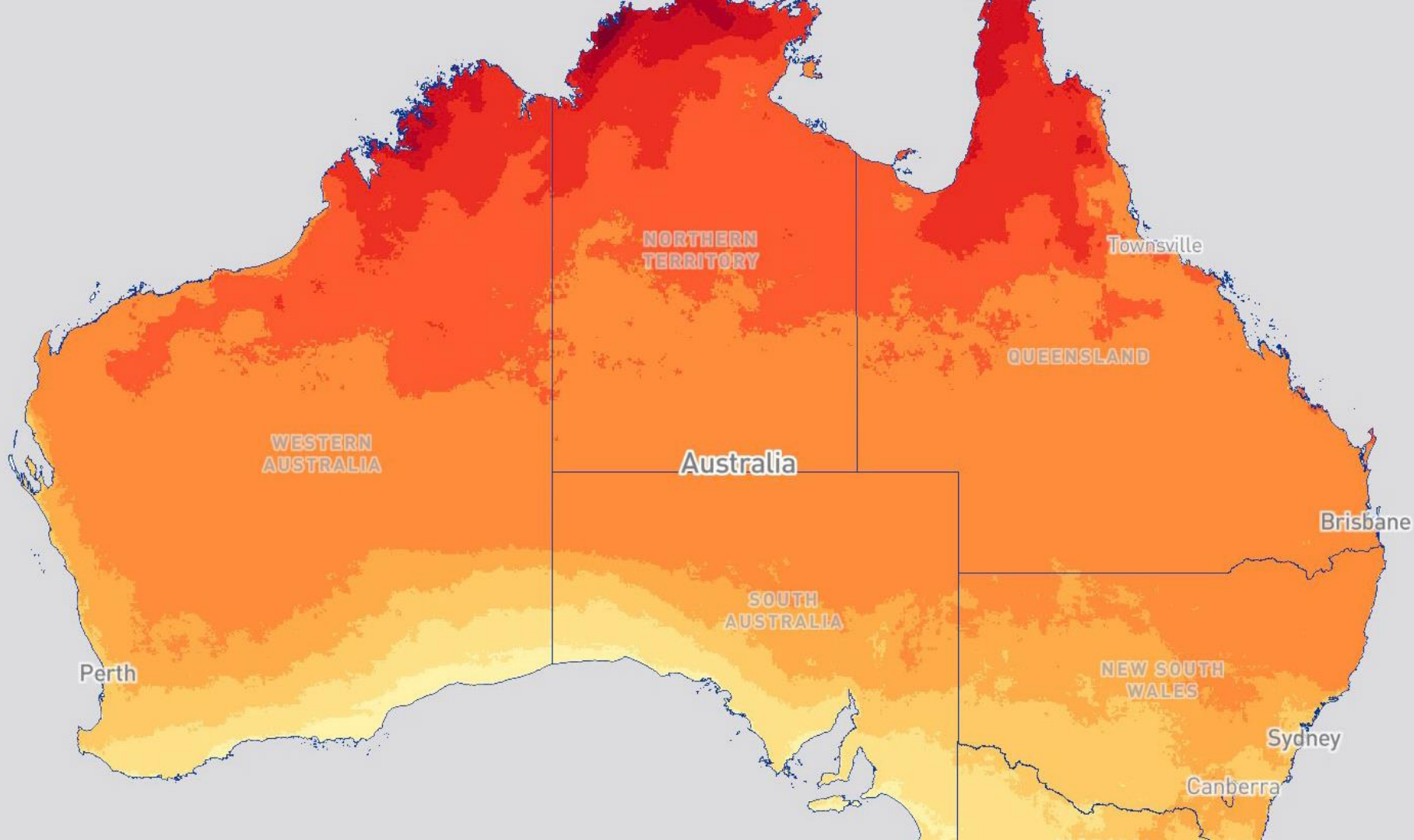
Desai Z, and Zhang Y. Climate Change and Women's Health: A Scoping Review. Geohealth. 2021 Sep 1;5(9):

National Climate Risk Assessment 2025

Women have been shown to be particularly vulnerable to climate change (Desai & Zhang, 2021), including risks to reproductive and maternal health from vector borne diseases linked to climate change (e.g. dengue fever) (Zack, 2022), though the impacts might vary between subgroups of the population (Hanigan et al., 2018; Seneviratne et al., 2021). Vulnerabilities for women also relate to being excluded from decision making processes and not having the agency to relocate away from climate hazards (Zack, 2022).

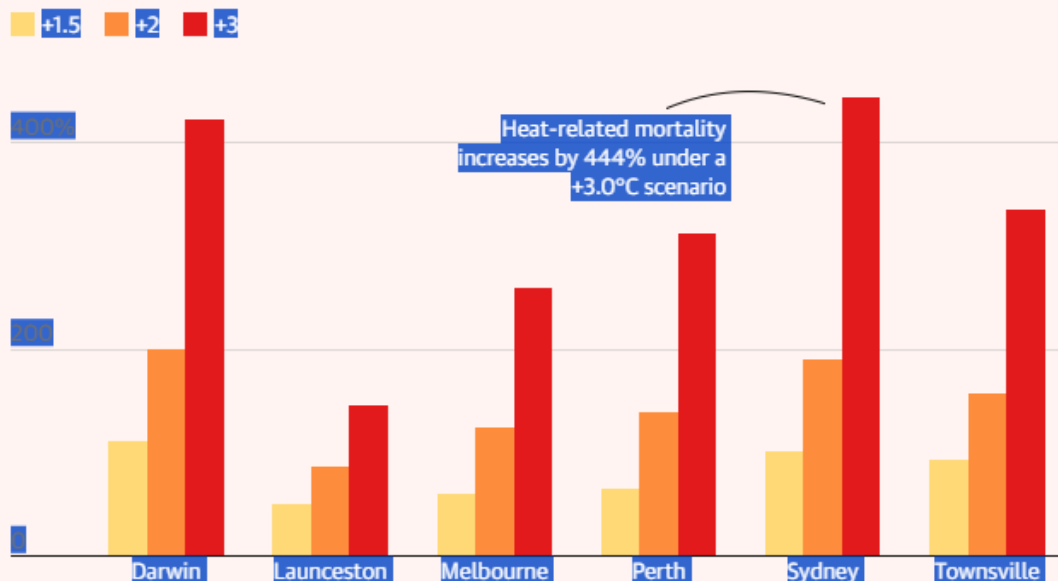
Desai, Z., & Zhang, Y. (2021). Climate change and women's health: A scoping review. *GeoHealth*, 5(9). <https://doi.org/10.1029/2021GH000386>

Zack, G. C. (2022). 5 facts about gender equality and climate change. United Nations Foundation. <https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/five-facts-about-genderequality-and-climate-change/>

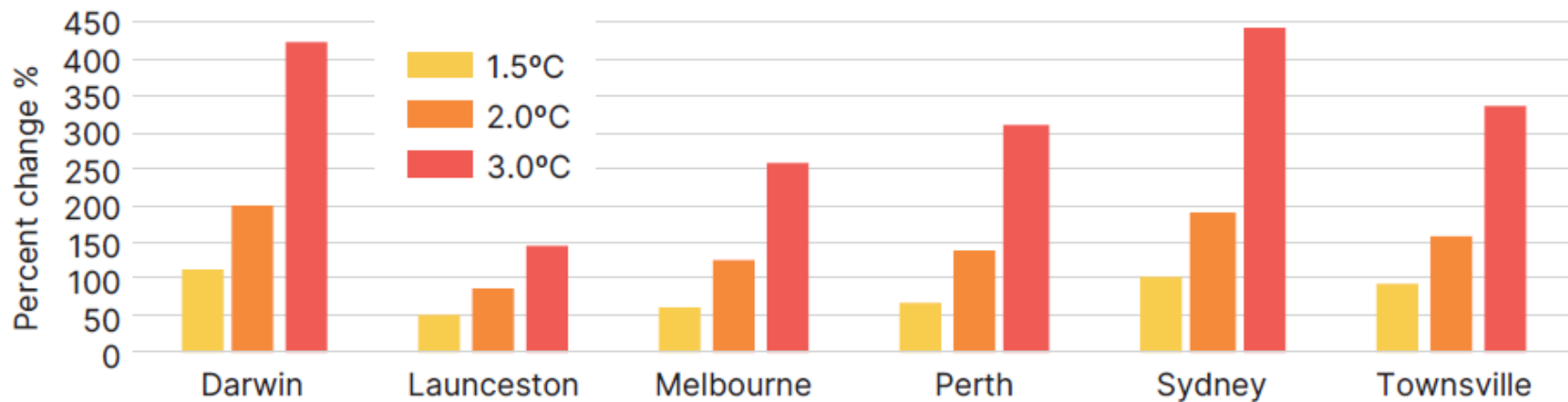


Heat-related mortality in Australia is predicted to rise with global warming

Showing the modelled increase in heat-related mortality* for selected Australian cities under different global warming levels: 1.5, 2 and 3 degree increases



Guardian graphic. Source: Australian Climate Service. Notes: *Data for these bars has been extracted from the National Climate Risk Assessment PDF, and so approximates the original values. The cities were selected by the Australian Climate Service



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THANK YOU

