



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**

Our Ref: ODG21-1827  
Contact:

Mr Chris Tallentire MLA  
Chair  
Education and Health Standing Committee  
Parliament House  
4 Harvest Terrace  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

**Via email:** [laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au](mailto:laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Tallentire

## **INQUIRY INTO THE RESPONSE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

I would like to thank the Education and Health Standing Committee for the invitation to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the response of Western Australian (WA) schools to climate change.

In December 2020, the Climate Health WA Inquiry (CHI) Report was tabled in Parliament by the Minister for Health. The CHI was established by the Chief Health Officer with the objective of reviewing the current planning and response capacity of the health system in relation to the health impacts of climate change, to make recommendations for improvement with respect to climate change mitigation and public health adaptation strategies, and to reduce the health system's environmental footprint (notably emissions and wastage). A full copy of the Report can be found on the Department of Health website at: <https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Improving-WA-Health/Climate-health-inquiry/Climate-Health-WA-Inquiry-Final-Report>.

Although the CHI was not expressly asked to investigate matters relating to schools, there are elements of the report that may be of interest to the Committee. The CHI investigates strategies for mitigation and adaptation, which I note are included in the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into the response of WA schools to climate change. Some of these findings, which I touch on later in this letter, may be useful to the Committee. I would also like to draw your attention to Chapter 4, *Our health, our community*, in which Professor Tarun Weeramanthri discusses populations vulnerable to climate change, including children and youth, as well as outlining concepts of building and strengthening community resilience. Children's young lungs and immune systems are particularly susceptible to the poorer air quality related to climate change. Today's children are also showing signs of anxiety and poorer mental health in response to concerns about climate change. Approaches to strengthening community

resilience focus on supporting communities to help themselves, through a range of strategies focused on increasing local capacity, social support and resources, and decreasing risks such as those due to miscommunication and trauma.

In Chapter 8, *Planning for adaptation*, Professor Weeramanthri touches on approaches to planning, including the built environment and the relationship to public health generally. Again, while the CHI did not specifically consider the role of schools in adaptation to climate and health challenges, because schools are such an important community setting, many of the CHI findings may also be relevant to the education sector.

The CHI observes that what is good for the planet is good for human health (p. 90). The Department of Health is actively involved in promoting a cross-sectoral approach to bring about healthier environments for Western Australians. These include supporting initiatives that promote active transport (walking, cycling or catching public transport), which brings benefits of increasing physical activity, boosting mental health and community connectedness and improving air quality, while reducing road crash trauma and greenhouse gas emissions from car use. The Department also supports policies that provide safe, attractive and inclusive public green spaces for recreation, which make our urban areas more enjoyable to live in, but also contribute to reducing the urban heat effect of the built environment. More broadly, shifting community preferences to favour healthier foods and drinks makes for a healthier population, but also has the potential to support local agriculture, build a more resilient food system, and benefit the environment by reducing transport miles.

While the Department of Health is not the lead agency on any of these important initiatives, I am sharing them with you to show the importance of a cross-Government approach to developing community resilience and environmental sustainability. I trust this information is of assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Angela Kelly  
**A/DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL**

 November 2021