

31 October 2019

Anglicare NT's Submission to:

The Northern Territory Climate Change Response

Anglicare NT is one of the largest providers of government-funded welfare, social justice and community development services in the Northern Territory. The organisation employs more than 430 staff and delivers support services to over 16,000 Territorians each year.

We believe that a healthy and safe natural environment is essential to our mission. There is a demonstratable link between environmental degradation, climate change and negative social and health impacts. Climate change is not just an environmental issue but a social one.

The Climate Response Paper is an important step in the right direction. Anglicare NT congratulates the NT Government for recognising the need for action and the great economic opportunities that this can present.

Indeed, *“Addressing climate change helps us to protect the things we value most; the things we can't put a price on.”*

However, the Government must strengthen the Response. A comprehensive climate change plan requires more depth and more detail.

Communities are telling us climate change is impacting them right now. Recently, the temperature has hit over 38 degrees in Darwin, 40 degrees in the rural area. Just shy of record-breaking temperatures.

Anglicare NT submits that much more can and must be done to draw down emissions and protect the vulnerable in our community from the negative impacts of climate change.

Emissions reduction target

An emissions reduction target signals to business and industry that the Government is serious about reducing carbon pollution. It sets the decision-making agenda. An 'aspirational' target is not as effective. It indicates that this target is optional.

Anglicare NT call on the Government to legislate targets of 100% renewables by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050. This must include interim targets, and other accountability mechanisms to ensure the targets are met.

Government leadership

The Response Paper says the NT Government will 'embed greenhouse gas emissions reduction considerations across Government decision making'. This should be a priority action that happens immediately. Policy, budgets, procurement and capital works decisions should, right now, be considering the impact.

The NT Government is one of the largest employers in the Northern Territory. Changing the way decisions are made to consider sustainability and pollution would have an immediate and significant impact on the Territory's emissions. It would also lead by example and have a cascading effect on Government contractors.

Adaptation planning

Adaptation planning must start from the frame – how can we ensure a just transition? A transition that recognises that the most vulnerable in our community have the least capacity to adapt. A transition that listens, carefully, to local communities and supports local solutions. A transition that embeds Aboriginal knowledge of country at its centre. A transition that gives all Territorians the opportunity to share in the economic benefits.

The people we work with are some of the **most vulnerable in the community**. Anglicare NT want to ensure that their **voices are heard** and that their **needs are prioritised** in any adaptation planning.

Anglicare NT provides services such as aged care, disability support, mental health, housing, counselling, financial counselling, youth work and support for children and families. Our main offices are in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Nhulunbuy and we reach around 16,000 Territorians per year.

Anglicare NT have canvassed some of our services to ascertain their thoughts on climate change, it's impacts and how services like Anglicare NT can help.

Housing

A recent survey of residents in one of our housing programs in Darwin highlighted heat as a major concern. Residents talked about having to take frequent cold showers and not being able to sleep properly because of the heat. As we know, climate change is only gong to exacerbate this issue.

Most public and social housing does not have air-conditioning. Air-conditioning uses a high amount of energy and is expensive to run for low-income households. Rooftop solar with battery storage and air-conditioning should be installed for elderly and people with additional health needs living in public or social housing. This would help reduce emissions, mitigate against the increasing heat and saves low-income households money to spend on other essentials like food and medicines. We note that installation, maintenance and disposal of air-conditioners must be strictly managed to prevent fluorocarbons from leaking into the atmosphere.

Other measures to assist those in public and social housing to adapt must include building design guidelines that are better suited to the tropical conditions and promote airflow. Retrofitting existing dwellings with better insulation and other heat resistant technologies.

Youth

Our youth mental health services report that young people are feeling anxious about climate change and its impact on their future. Our Aboriginal engagement workers from Katherine say that young people in that region are “definitely” concerned about climate change. They observe that their country is dryer and hotter and its effecting the availability of bush tucker. They say, “We are not getting as much rain, the land, animals and rivers are dying out.”

At the recent NT Youth Health Summit, participants called on the Government to act on the climate emergency as one of their top priorities. The young people asserted ‘that the climate crisis is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century’.

Young people tell us they want education about climate change, about what is happening now and what is likely to happen in the future. This information will help them to make decisions about how to prepare. Organisations working with young people like Anglicare NT should be resourced support this.

Aged Care

Older people also told us they are also concerned, some reported feeling ‘anxious’ even while acknowledging that they may not be alive for the worst of it. They “worried about the future for children, grandchildren and great grandchildren”.

The older people were concerned about changes to the environment that “don’t normally occur” such as drought, bush fires and increasing heat. They reported that it seemed to be affecting people’s health, particularly those with respiratory conditions.

Low income older people, very young people and people with health conditions are particularly vulnerable the adverse health impacts associated with climate change. Higher temperatures, poor air quality from increased bush fires and stronger cyclones all pose significant risks. Detailed adaptation plans relating to assisting these vulnerable people must be a priority for Government.

With the right resources, organisations like Anglicare NT could have a role to play in educating vulnerable people about adapting such as keeping cool in the heat.

The Climate Response is a commendable starting point but more needs to be done. Legislated emissions reduction targets and all of government strategies need to be implemented immediately. Adaptation planning must be made a priority, ensuring that the most vulnerable people are considered first.

Anglicare NT recognise that all individuals and organisations must be a part of the solution.