

## Problem

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Climate change is a major public mental health concern, especially where poverty and insecure housing intersect. It affects social and environmental health determinants, as more frequent heatwaves, bushfires, droughts, and storms threaten homes and essential infrastructure. These events elevate stress and displacement, particularly in disadvantaged communities, while straining already stretched healthcare and emergency services.

The mental health burden is amplified by overlapping disasters and livelihood stress, with children and young people especially impacted. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face disproportionate impacts, including loss of connection and homelessness. The built environment can both amplify or ameliorate risk. Poor housing increases vulnerability, while inclusive, well-designed spaces foster resilience and social connection. Adaptation is vital, with local climate plans and features like tree canopy, shading, and cooling infrastructure helping communities cope and recover.

**76%**

of Australians aged 12-25 concerned about climate change

**400%**

expected rise in heat-related deaths in Sydney if global temperatures climb by 2-3 degrees



## Subject Matter Experts

**Lyrian Daniel**

Email: [Lyrian.Daniel@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Lyrian.Daniel@unisa.edu.au)  
Phone: +61 8 8302 9740  
[people.unisa.edu.au/Lyrian.Daniel](http://people.unisa.edu.au/Lyrian.Daniel)

**Jo McClellan**

Email: [jo@twothings.au](mailto:jo@twothings.au)  
Phone: +61 407 932 573  
[twothings.au](http://twothings.au)

**Jacky Dawkins**

Email: [jacqueline.dawkins@sydney.edu.au](mailto:jacqueline.dawkins@sydney.edu.au)  
[sydney.edu.au/matilda-centre](http://sydney.edu.au/matilda-centre)

## Contact and Membership

Interested in learning more or in joining the HUE CoP?

Contact: Alexander at [alexander@healthycities.org.au](mailto:alexander@healthycities.org.au)  
or call 4283 8111

## Case Studies

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### Case Study 1: University of Sydney - Climate Change, Place and Mental Health Incubator

The Climate Change, Place and Mental Health Incubator is a cross-disciplinary program housed at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, supported by the Henry Halloran Urban and Regional Research Initiative at the University of Sydney and led by Dr Marlee Bower. The Incubator explores how climate change, the built environment, and mental health intersect in Australia. It connects researchers in architecture, planning, geography, social work, and public health to identify how housing, neighbourhoods, and communities influence exposure to climate-related stressors and mental health outcomes. This Incubator program builds cross-disciplinary USYD research excellence by forging unprecedented partnerships between the Faculties of Medicine and Health; Architecture, Design and Planning; Education and Social Work; and Political Economy.

#### Resources

University of Sydney Climate Change, Place and Mental Health Incubator, <https://bit.ly/47EvqUx>

### Case Study 2: Housing, Climate, and Mental Health

Data from the Australian Housing Conditions Data Infrastructure (AHCDI) provides valuable national insights into the ways in which housing type can assuage or amplify the impacts of climate change. Looking at the relationship between **housing type and mental health**, residents of homes built between the 1950s and 2000s report poorer mental health than those in newer dwellings. **Tenure, housing quality, and mental health** are also closely related. The data shows that homeowners report the highest housing quality, followed by mortgage holders, private renters, and then public renters. People with poor mental health are more likely to report living in poor housing conditions. We also know that **inequality shapes vulnerability**. Unequal positions within the housing market reinforce health inequalities and amplify the mental health risks associated with climate change.

Housing quality, security, and affordability are integral to climate resilience and mental wellbeing. Addressing these issues requires structural change: retrofitting existing homes (particularly for low-income households), setting minimum rental standards, and tackling the social and economic inequalities that shape health outcomes. Political will and public awareness are needed to ensure these priorities move from research to policy and action.

#### Resources

Australian Housing Conditions Data Infrastructure, <https://bit.ly/4otKJGM>