



Hon Jill Hennessy MP

Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services

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John Englart
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Dear Mr Englart

Thank you for your letter regarding Victoria's heatwave preparedness. Victoria has experienced two significant heatwave events over the last five years, demonstrating the importance of heatwave management and preparedness as you have highlighted in your letter. I apologise for the delay in responding to your letter.

The Department of Health & Human Services recognises the significant impacts of extreme heat and heatwave and the importance of protecting, informing and supporting all Victorians, especially those most vulnerable, from the impacts of heat. The department works closely with other agencies to ensure extreme heat and heatwave management arrangements are understood and strengthened prior to summer.

The Victorian Auditor-General's October 2014 report, *Heatwave management: reducing the risk to public health*, highlighted opportunities for improvement of heatwave management in Victoria. I am pleased to advise that the department has responded to the Auditor General's recommendations. This includes circulation of a revised Department of Health & Human Services *Emergency Preparedness Clients and Services Policy* to health sector partners to prepare for emergencies, including extreme heat events, and to plan for the risk of critical infrastructure failure.

Every year, the department promotes heat health preparedness and awareness of heat health risks. In 2014-15 this included:

- distribution of the heatwave newsletter to all health sector stakeholders;
- hosting of a new annual heatwave forum for stakeholders including health services, aged care providers, local government and emergency services;
- the introduction of a new subscription system to enable subscribers to receive Chief Health Officer alerts and advisories, including heat health alerts and other emergency information;
- distribution of heat health resources to approximately 6000 stakeholders including health services, aged and disability service providers, sporting groups and seniors and community organisations; and
- annual summer preparedness forums held throughout Victoria that include heat health.

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Arrangements for the coordination and escalation of the health response to emergencies are documented in the *State Health Emergency Response Plan 2013*. Additionally, public health services plan for surge requirements under their Code Brown plans.

Ambulance Victoria responds to all major emergencies as outlined in the *Emergency Management Act 1986*, the *Emergency Management Act 2013*, the *State Emergency Response Plan*, the *State Health Emergency Response Plan*, and the *State Heat Plan*. The Ambulance Victoria has its own Emergency Response Plan (updated December 2014) which outlines the actions taken in response to major emergencies.

Ambulance Victoria also has a specific *Heatwave Subplan*, which was developed following the 2009 heatwave and updated in December 2013. This Subplan details how Ambulance Victoria will prepare for heat health alert days; the Subplan was implemented during the January 2014 heatwave. Ambulance Victoria is active in the media promoting heat health messaging to the community prior to and during extreme heat.

Finally, in relation to the department's heat health thresholds for issuing heat health alerts, I am advised that the thresholds for Victoria are based on research conducted by Monash University, an evaluation of the department's heat health framework in 2011 and additional work completed in collaboration with the Bureau of Meteorology. The current heat health threshold for Melbourne (Central District) will remain at 30°C for 2015-2016 summer. The department regularly considers new research and information to inform decision making.

Thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



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