



COLLECTIVE ACTION

FOR EXTREME HEAT RESILIENCE

Strengthening community resilience to extreme heat through partnerships in Greater Western Sydney and beyond (2023-2026)



THE HEAT CHALLENGE

Heat kills more Australians than any other natural hazard.

Extreme heat days are projected to continue to **increase**.

Urban Heat Island effects create **localised hotspots**, increasing both daytime and nighttime temperatures and exacerbating heat-related risks for urban communities.

Extreme heat affects interconnected systems, including across power, water, shelter, transportation, health, livelihoods, and education, creating cascading impacts.

Greater Western Sydney is a **rapidly growing urban region** where barriers to accessing services, healthcare, and support can increase vulnerability to extreme heat.

Urban Climate Resilience Program

The Urban Climate Resilience Program (UCRP) is a global initiative operating in cities across Australia, Colombia, Ecuador, Italy, Malaysia, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. UCRP brings together the Z Zurich Foundation, Zurich Insurance teams, C40 Cities, ICLEI, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Plan International and Resilient Cities Network.

The program aims to build sustainable, resilient communities that can withstand, recover from, and thrive in the face of climate-related disasters. UCRP combines locally led resilience-building with strategic partnerships, evidence-based advocacy, and systems change to address identified resilience gaps.

In Australia, UCRP is led by Australian Red Cross in partnership with Zurich Australia and IFRC. Between 2023 and 2026, UCRP Australia strengthened extreme heat resilience in vulnerable communities across Greater Western Sydney through community action, organisational capacity building, awareness raising, and cross-sector collaboration.



Image: Conor Ashleigh

Extreme heat is a complex, systemic challenge that no single organisation can solve alone. Sustainable resilience requires collective action across communities, governments, researchers, civil society, businesses and humanitarian actors. In Australia, the **Urban Climate Resilience Program** acted as a catalyst, convener and trusted partner to bring these actors together and turn evidence into action.

Climate Resilience Measurement for Communities

The Climate Resilience Measurement for Communities (CRMC), developed by the Zurich Climate Resilience Alliance, is a data-driven framework and digital tool that helps communities assess their ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from climate-related hazards. In Greater Western Sydney, the CRMC was implemented to identify local resilience strengths, vulnerabilities, and priority areas for action, providing an evidence base to guide interventions and build support among stakeholders. The assessment examined resilience across human, social, physical, natural, and financial dimensions, drawing on household surveys, key informant interviews, focus groups, and secondary data sources to generate a comprehensive understanding of community resilience.

The Greater Western Sydney Region encompasses 13 local government areas (LGAs) and is home to more than two million people.

Between 2023 and 2026, UCRP Australia focused on supporting vulnerable communities in three priority LGAs:

- Blacktown City Council
- City of Canterbury Bankstown
- Penrith City Council



SYDNEY



These communities experience compounding vulnerabilities, including high exposure to urban heat, diverse and growing populations, lower socio-economic conditions, ageing housing, higher proportions of renters and social housing residents, employment challenges and resource constraints in public schools.

Image: Australian Red Cross



OUR IMPACT

Communities are better prepared

Community members and local organisations increased their ability to prepare for and respond to extreme heat.

24,000+ people positively impacted through community programming.

Partnerships multiplied impact

Cross-sector partnerships amplified the program's impact enabling actions that no single organisation could have achieved independently.

An estimated **100,000+** people positively impacted through partnerships and influencing.

Systems are changing

Evidence generated through the program is influencing policy, planning, funding and practice at local, state and national levels.

Building on UCRP's extreme heat resilience platform, the multi-partner Extreme Heat Awareness Day campaign in 2026 reached a potential **6.8 million people** through national media and public engagement activities.



Image: Australian Red Cross



Image: Australian Red Cross

Addressing the growing risks of extreme heat requires **coordinated efforts across sectors**, connecting communities, governments, researchers, civil society, businesses, and humanitarian organisations around shared goals and action.

Through the UCRP, Australian Red Cross leveraged its trusted humanitarian role, extensive community networks, and expertise in resilience-building to convene and strengthen partnerships across sectors. Zurich Australia played a key strategic role, supporting community engagement, evidence generation, and advocacy across public and private sectors.

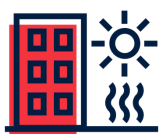
Together, partners contributed across four pathways for impact:



Shaping policy,
practice and
investment



Driving collective
action and
systems change



Strengthening
and scaling local
resilience action



Building a shared
evidence base for
action



SHAPING POLICY, PRACTICE AND INVESTMENT

The UCRP program worked with partners to translate community evidence, technical insights, and practitioner expertise into policy influence, funding decisions, and institutional commitments that support long-term resilience. By linking local experience with decision-making processes, the program helped strengthen Australia's broader policy landscape on extreme heat and resilience.

Collaboration through the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) Heatwave Taskforce translated evidence and partnership work into major policy and funding outcomes for heat resilience in Greater Western Sydney. The co-developed **Heat Smart City Plan**—endorsed by state government and key stakeholders—established a unified, action-oriented framework for managing heat risk to 2030. It also elevated TeleRedi as a priority service for protecting vulnerable residents during heatwaves, leading to advocacy for sustained government funding and exploration of continued scale-up.

Community evidence, including CRMC findings, directly informed **local government investment and action on heat resilience**. One target city council secured a Federal Disaster Ready Fund grant to scale community-led heat preparedness, while other councils allocated funding for information sessions, cooling kits, and pilot initiatives such as shuttle buses and extended library services during extreme heat events.

UCRP enabled wider influence on **city and state heat resilience policy and planning**, including contributions to the Victorian Heat Response Plan and NSW Cool Places Guidelines, as well as representation on the Resilient Sydney Board, embedding humanitarian perspectives in urban resilience governance.

Key partners

- City Councils
- Metropolitan bodies
- State and national authorities

“The Australian Red Cross has been an invaluable member of the Greater Western Sydney Heat Taskforce, bringing a community perspective to broader policy discussions around infrastructure, housing, health, workplace safety and heatwave emergency response. This ensured that the Taskforce’s work remained focused on outcomes for people – including physical, economic and psycho-social wellbeing”

Judith Bruinsma,
WSROC, Interim
CEO



DRIVING COLLECTIVE ACTION AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

The Urban Climate Resilience Program focused on driving long-term systems change by shifting how heat risk is understood, prioritised, and acted upon across Australia. Through strategic convening and sustained partnerships, the program helped reframe extreme heat as a systemic risk, strengthen national dialogue, and embed heat resilience more firmly in public and institutional agendas.

Key partners

- Civil Society Organisations
- City councils
- Metropolitan bodies
- State and national authorities
- Media

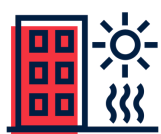
Australian Red Cross, in partnership with Sweltering Cities and a broad coalition of over 80 organisations, established **Extreme Heat Awareness Day** (EHAD) as Australia's first coordinated national campaign on heatwave preparedness and resilience. Informed by global practice, including the IFRC-led Heat Action Day, the initiative was adapted to Australia's summer heat context. What began as a locally focused resilience initiative evolved into a **national platform for collective action**, bringing together civil society, government, research institutions, the private sector, and media. Launched in February 2025, the campaign combined national media, community events, webinars, advocacy, and volunteer engagement to shift public understanding of heatwaves from routine weather to serious disasters requiring preparedness and action. The campaign reached over 3.3 million people in 2025 and 6.8 million in 2026. EHAD has since become an annual, multi-partner platform embedded in national resilience efforts.

"We all know Australia has a hot climate and we're used to it, but perhaps many people are a little naïve to dealing with extreme heat, which brings an entirely different level of risk. Our concern is first and foremost the safety of our community in dealing with the consequences of extreme heat."

Ivon Sebastian, Project Officer, City of Canterbury Bankstown



Image: Australian Red Cross



STRENGTHENING AND SCALING LOCAL RESILIENCE ACTION

This pathway strengthened resilience through a dual approach: building the knowledge, confidence, and preparedness of community members directly, while also strengthening the capacity of service providers and local organisations that support vulnerable populations. By combining locally led action with partnerships and co-delivery, the program extended its impact and scaled resilience-building efforts.

Key partners

- Community members
- Local leaders
- Civil Society Organisations
- City Councils
- Service Providers

Through **inter-agency forums, community events, and climate pop-ups**, the program expanded partnerships, connected with vulnerable populations, and promoted practical resilience tools.

Extreme Heat Preparedness Workshops equipped individuals and households with practical heatwave preparedness skills through interactive training, demonstrations, and planning activities, resulting in participants developing household heat action plans and increasing confidence to prepare for and respond to heatwaves. Workshops were delivered across diverse community settings and adapted for online and classroom use.

First Aid for Summer trained community members to recognise and respond to heat-related illness and emergencies, strengthening local preparedness and creating a sustainable training offering now available nationally through the Australian Red Cross.

RediCommunities supported residents through a two-year, community-led resilience process to identify heat risks, develop local action plans, strengthen social connections, and implement community-owned solutions, including distributing cool kits to vulnerable residents.

Partnered with the Powerhouse Museum and multiple stakeholders to deliver the **50°C Climate, Heat & Resilience Program**, equipping over 1,000 students from high schools across Western Sydney with knowledge and skills to address extreme heat through interactive learning, school-based action plans, and a culminating climate summit.

The **Redi to Adapt approach** used participatory workshops, hazard mapping, and emergency planning exercises with service providers and organisations supporting vulnerable populations to strengthen readiness and capacity to support staff and clients during extreme heat.



BUILDING A SHARED EVIDENCE BASE FOR ACTION

Working with key partners, the program collected and translated data and local insights into accessible guidance for decision-makers and practitioners. By building a shared evidence base, partners developed a common understanding of heat risk across sectors and identified priority areas for intervention.

Strengthened extreme heat policy and practice through an **applied research study** in collaboration with ISET International and Monash University, generating system-wide insights on impacts across policy, workplace, and community dimensions. As the first application of a Post Event Review Capability (PERC) to heat, the findings were translated into three reports (2026) that informed decision-making and were widely disseminated nationally and internationally, supporting improved understanding and more targeted action on heat risk gaps.

Key partners

- Research and academic sector
- Civil Society Organisations
- City Councils

"If we had the right data, reflecting the reality on the ground, it would rocket up the ladder in terms of importance. If we had the data it would then flow into policies at all levels."

Government agency representative



Read the three interconnected PERC reports on extreme heat [here](#)





Image: Australian Red Cross

Improved preparedness and accessibility of heat risk information for vulnerable populations through **co-developed guidance materials** with trusted partners. For example, collaboration with MS Australia produced a targeted factsheet for people living with chronic illness, complemented by a preparedness-focused podcast.

Expanded uptake of evidence and best practice across national and international networks through webinars, conferences, and learning exchanges with partners.

"We run community events like this to start conversations about extreme heat, preparedness, and resilience. Just as importantly, we listen to people's experiences and create opportunities for communities to learn from one another. What excites me most is bringing those stories to the forefront of policy and change, ensuring community voices help shape decisions and action."

Sabrina Barra, Project Officer, Australian Red Cross



UCRP demonstrates that resilience is not built by a single organisation or intervention, but through **sustained partnerships connecting communities, institutions, and decision-makers** around shared approaches to reducing climate risk.

Substantial progress has been achieved in Greater Western Sydney, including increased awareness, stronger preparedness, and the establishment of influential partnerships. These foundations have enabled early systems change and demonstrated the practical value of the approach in the Australian context.

Building on these foundations, the next phase of UCRP (2026–2029) will scale proven approaches, strengthen cross-sector partnerships, and deepen system-level engagement across Sydney and Melbourne. It will focus on improving preparedness among vulnerable communities while supporting institutions and partners to better anticipate and manage extreme heat risks.



Deepening community resilience

Continue strengthening preparedness and social connections, and replicate locally led approaches in additional heat-affected communities.



Scaling partnership models

Expand successful initiatives through broader collaboration across public, private, and civil society partners to accelerate impact at scale.



Embedding heat resilience in systems

Continue influencing policy, planning and investment at city, state and national scales.

Learn more about the impact of the Urban Climate Resilience Program in Australia and how you can get involved in the next phase of the program (2026–2029).



Get in touch for more information: disaster_resilience@redcross.org.au