



Take
Climate
Action



Climate Safe Rooms and Yarra Home Energy Upgrade Pilot Programs

2024-2025 Report



CLIMATE SAFE ROOMS AND YARRA HOME ENERGY UPGRADE PILOT PROGRAMS 2024-2025 REPORT

In 2024-2025, Yarra Council delivered the Climate Safe Rooms and Yarra Home Energy Upgrade pilot programs, providing 54 low-income and at-risk households with 174 subsidised energy upgrade activities to improve thermal comfort, climate resilience, and energy efficiency.

The Climate Safe Rooms pilot program upgraded a room in the homes of fourteen eligible concession card holders who have a health condition exacerbated by extreme heat or cold, to create a space that can effectively and affordably maintain a comfortable temperature.

The Yarra Home Energy Upgrades pilot program provided forty eligible concession card holders with subsidies of up to \$3,000 for energy upgrades to improve thermal comfort, install solar, or electrify.

Background

The City of Yarra is home to a high proportion of residents living with socio-economic disadvantage, in what is an otherwise relatively affluent municipality. These pilot programs aimed to overcome socioeconomic and other barriers experienced by those most at risk from climate impacts including unaffordable upfront costs of home energy upgrades; a lack of knowledge and confidence in products, suppliers and 'where to start'; and technical barriers such as the age and condition of housing stock and ownership status.

The pilot programs aimed to include support for people facing other barriers to energy upgrades common among Yarra households, including: renting (49% of Yarra residents), living in community housing (9% of Yarra residents live in public or community housing), apartment/strata living (87.5% of Yarra dwellings are medium-high density), heritage overlay (67% of Yarra dwellings), and speaking a language other than English at home (25% of Yarra residents).

Despite a 7 Star NatHERs (Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme) standard for new homes, two thirds of existing Victorian homes have an energy efficiency rating of less than 2 stars. People on low incomes are less able to improve their homes' thermal comfort, access renewable energy, and enjoy the health and climate benefits of electrification, due to financial barriers. People with certain health conditions have an increased risk from heatwaves and prolonged exposure to cold indoor temperatures.

These pilot programs delivered on Council's commitment to provide targeted support to create climate-safe, thermally comfortable homes, and enable an equitable energy transition for those most at risk from climate impacts. This commitment is outlined in Council's [Climate Emergency Plan 2024-2030](#) and [Climate Emergency Action Plan 2024-2027](#).

Supporting residents in need

The pilot programs overcame a range of complex administrative, technical, socioeconomic, and approvals barriers to support residents at greater risk from climate impacts, including 28 apartment or townhouse residents, 9 renters, 13 community housing tenants, and 6 participants who speak a language other than English at home.

Participants reported struggling with high heating and cooling bills, becoming bedridden in extreme temperatures, lack of any heating or cooling, and lack of functioning electricity in parts of their home.

Pre-upgrade surveys were completed by eight Climate Safe rooms participants. Post-upgrade surveys were completed by six Climate Safe Rooms participants and 24 Yarra Home Energy Upgrades participants.

- 100% of Climate Safe Rooms participants surveyed reported having gone without some basic expenses in the past 12 months due to the cost (medical treatment, dental treatment, home repairs, and/or meals).
- 100% of Climate Safe Rooms participants surveyed felt the thermal comfort of their home affected their health, and 100% felt it affected their household's wellbeing. 100% have a health condition exacerbated by extreme temperatures, and 100% identify as a person with a disability.
- All Climate Safe Rooms participants and nearly half (46%) of Yarra Home Energy Upgrades participants surveyed reported an annual household income of less than \$50,000.
- Nearly half of Climate Safe Rooms participants (45%) are living alone, an additional risk factor for increased mortality during heatwaves. Of those living with others, 50% have another household member who has a health condition that puts them at risk from heat or cold, and 88% have another household member who has a disability or limited mobility.
- 83% of Yarra Home Energy Upgrades participants surveyed have at least one risk factor for poor health outcomes in extreme temperatures, such as disability, age, living alone, or a health condition, and 33% are living with another person with additional risk factors.

Outcomes, successes and co-benefits

Fifty-four low-income and at-risk households were supported with 174 subsidised energy upgrade activities to improve thermal comfort, climate resilience, and energy efficiency. Upgrades included draughtproofing, ceiling insulation, reverse cycle air conditioning, solar, heat pump hot water systems, and other tailored works such as window blinds or ceiling fans, where recommended for the household.

Post-upgrade surveys were completed by six Climate Safe Rooms participants and 25 Yarra Home Energy Upgrade participants.

- Eighty-three percent of Climate Safe Rooms participants said that their health on cold days had improved as a result of the energy upgrades.
- Similarly, 83% of CSR participants surveyed said that their ability to manage their health issues, and their wellbeing, on cold days had improved as a result of the energy upgrades.
- Over half (52%) of Yarra Home Energy Upgrades participants surveyed said their homes were much more or somewhat more thermally comfortable after energy upgrades. Over half (52%) said their health and wellbeing had improved, and their ability to go about their daily tasks had improved.

Successes and co-benefits include:

- Participants are benefitting from improved thermal comfort, increased ability to cope in extreme temperatures, and improved energy efficiency.
- Improved health outcomes are an expected outcome. Research from the Victorian Healthy Homes program found, after similar energy upgrades, a healthcare cost savings of \$887 per winter for each household.
- Participants have received referrals to additional support including to health and social services, legal services, and financial planning services.
- Two participants received Brotherhood of St Laurence Climate Safe Homes funding to receive additional upgrades.
- Electrical wiring was made safe in two homes to reduce identified fire risk.
- One participant's owner's corporation previously rejected a proposal for reverse cycle air conditioning, but with documentation from the Yarra Home Energy Upgrades pilot program she was able to gain approval. This has paved the way for others in the building to receive approval to install split systems.
- Participants received a thermal assessment of their home, including a report with recommended upgrades to improve the thermal comfort of their home, as well as educational factsheets.
- The pilot programs leveraged additional funding from State and Federal rebates and other programs to maximise the impact of Council funding.

The Yarra Home Energy Upgrades program is running again in 2025/26. Learn more at yarracity.vic.gov.au/energy-upgrades.

Participant quotes

"I'm so, so happy. I'm still in disbelief that I have solar. The draughtproofing in the rest of the house - they did a fantastic job and it has made a big difference. You would feel a little tornado in the house coming from the front door before. **With the solar installed now, I'm not scared now to use the heating in the lounge room.** It's going to make an enormous impact, and I know in summer I won't be afraid to put it on." – Climate Safe Rooms participant

"I will be able to use my west facing bedroom in summer - something I have not been able to do since I moved in. As an older person (with a bed adapted to my needs) this is a

benefit beyond measure – something that even now I find hard to fully comprehend.” – Yarra Home Energy Upgrades participant

“Your people actually listened to my account of a problem that others had preferred to dismiss. They established the reality of my discomfort - and also the difficulties that would be entailed in dealing with it. And then they went ahead and worked their way tirelessly through the multiple barriers that had seemed so insurmountable, culminating in the cheerful (and respectful) installation of the new equipment. **The boost to my morale, my mental health, and my faith in a world that too often seems uncaring, has been enormous.**” – Yarra Home Energy Upgrades participant

“The Yarra Home Energy Upgrades program gave me a chance to find out what could be done about problems I had pretty well given up on. I was freezing in winter and wilting in summer because I felt helpless (particularly as a tenant) to do anything about it. That created **physical discomfort and related problems and a depressing sense of helplessness. Participation in the program has made it possible to overcome both.**” – Yarra Home Energy Upgrades participant

“**Above all, I am no longer afraid of summer.** My bedroom will be usable - actually comfortable - all year round, and this is going to make a huge difference to my life. At this point **I can still hardly believe it happened. I keep looking at the new unit as if it's a figment of my imagination and could vanish at any moment. I'm grateful beyond measure** and will continue to be so every day I experience its ability to handle the extremes of climate I used to dread.” – Yarra Home Energy Upgrades participant

“**It's helped in so many ways, with the pain and being able to relax my body, and also reducing the stress of the energy bills.**” – Climate Safe Rooms participant