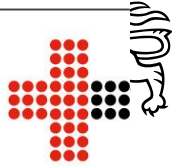


UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

**MENZIES**



Institute for Medical Research

# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people

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**Menzies Institute for Medical Research**

**University of Tasmania**

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A close-up photograph showing a person's hands hovering over a collection of traditional Indigenous objects. The objects are laid out on a brown fur rug. In the foreground, there is a broken red clay pot. Behind it is a woven basket containing dark objects, possibly seeds or small stones. To the right, there is a beaded necklace with a blue and white cord and a dark stone. Several smooth, dark stones are scattered on the rug. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green grass and a white fence.

## Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the Larrakia people, the traditional owners of the land where this research was conducted. I acknowledge the palawa/pakana people of lutruwita/Tasmania, the traditional owners of the land where I live and work.

I pay respects to Elders past and present as the knowledge holders and sharers. I honour their strong culture and knowledge as vital to the self-determination, wellbeing and resilience of their communities.

I stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language and history.

# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



## Today...

- What is the issue?
- What did we do?
- What did we find out?
- What does it mean?



# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



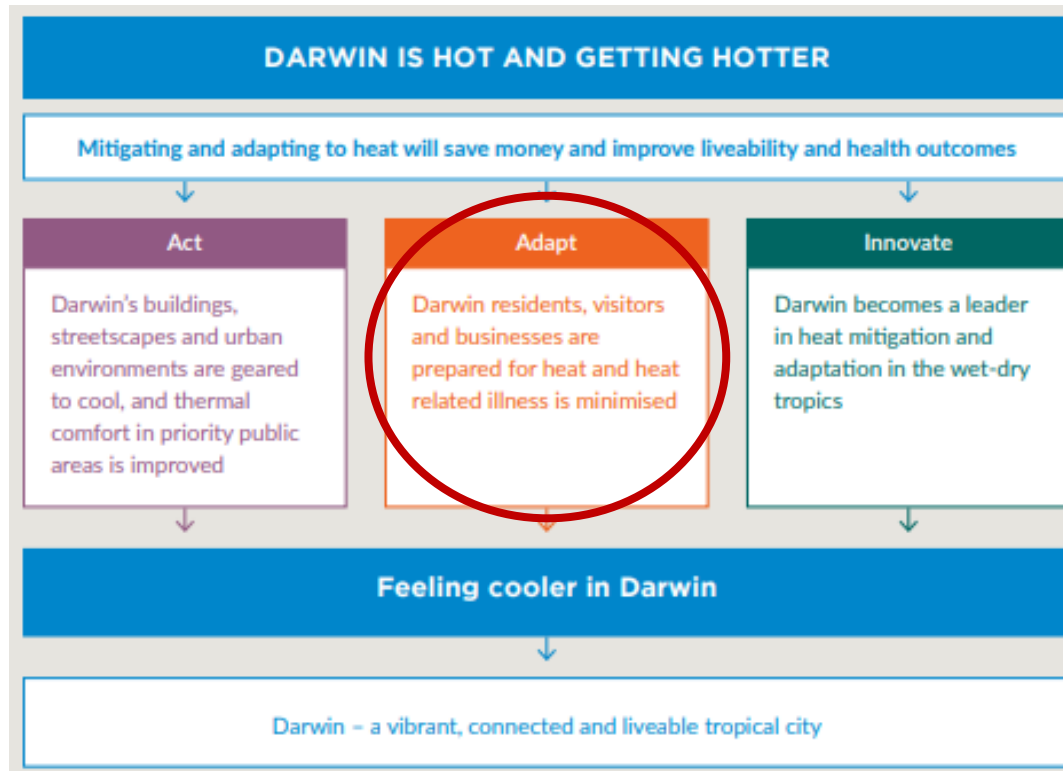
## What is the issue?

- Darwin is hot
- And humid
- Or smoky
- These conditions make people sick, and place additional burden on the health system
- High proportion of vulnerable groups in NT
  - Elderly
  - Young
  - People with existing medical conditions (heart/lung)

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## Darwin Heat Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy: Feeling Cooler in Darwin



## FEELING COOLER IN DARWIN

Darwin Heat Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy



# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people

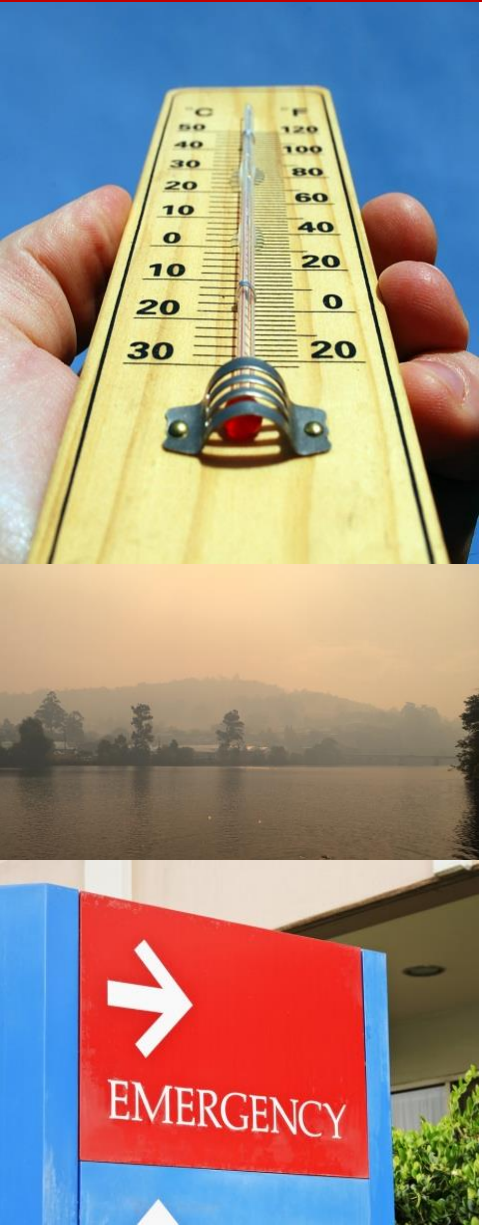


## What did we do?

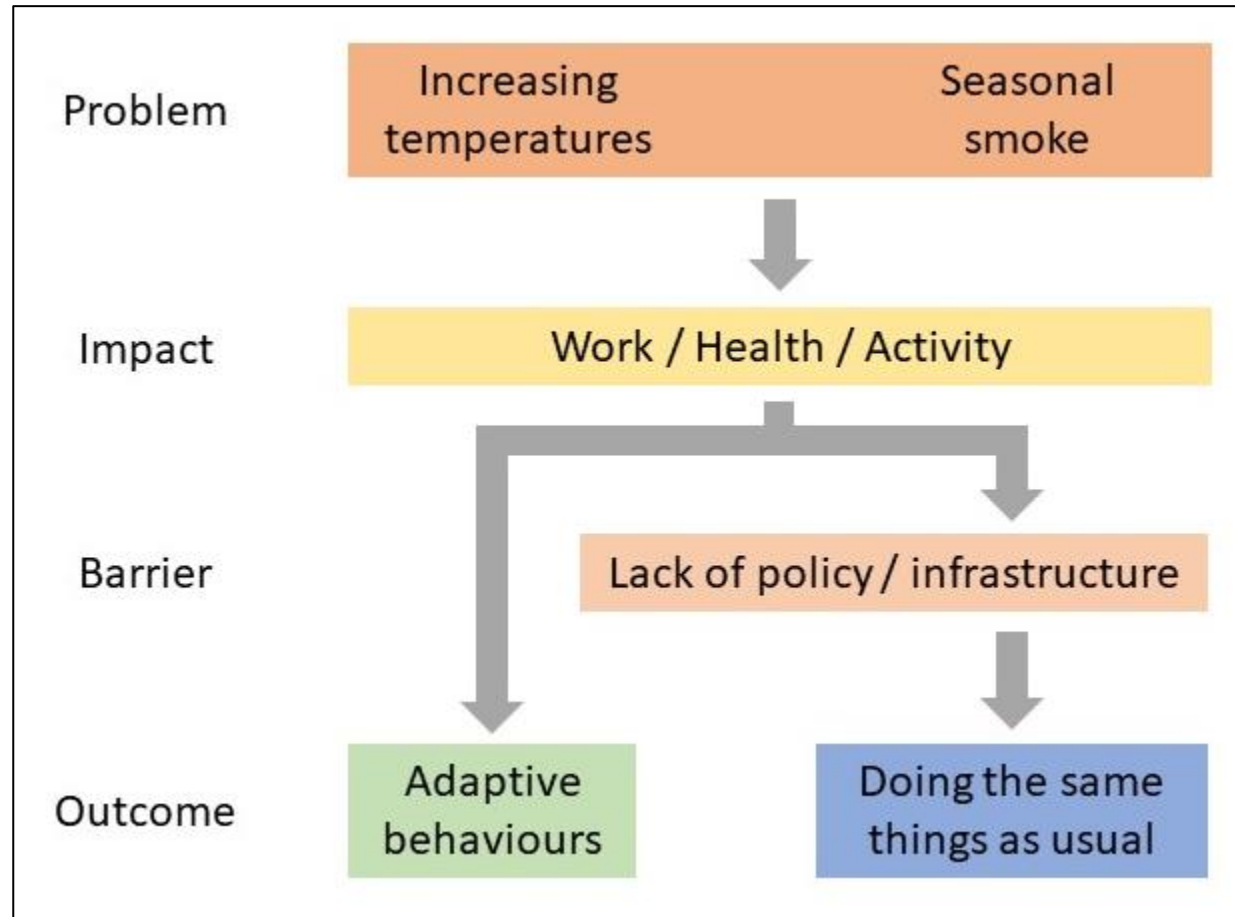
- People who live, work and play in the Top End
- Settings identified in *Feeling Cooler in Darwin*
  - Outdoor workers
  - Teachers and carers
  - Sports people
- Focus groups – an in depth dive
  - How do people experience these conditions? What do they do to adapt? What could be done better?
- Conducted in May 2022



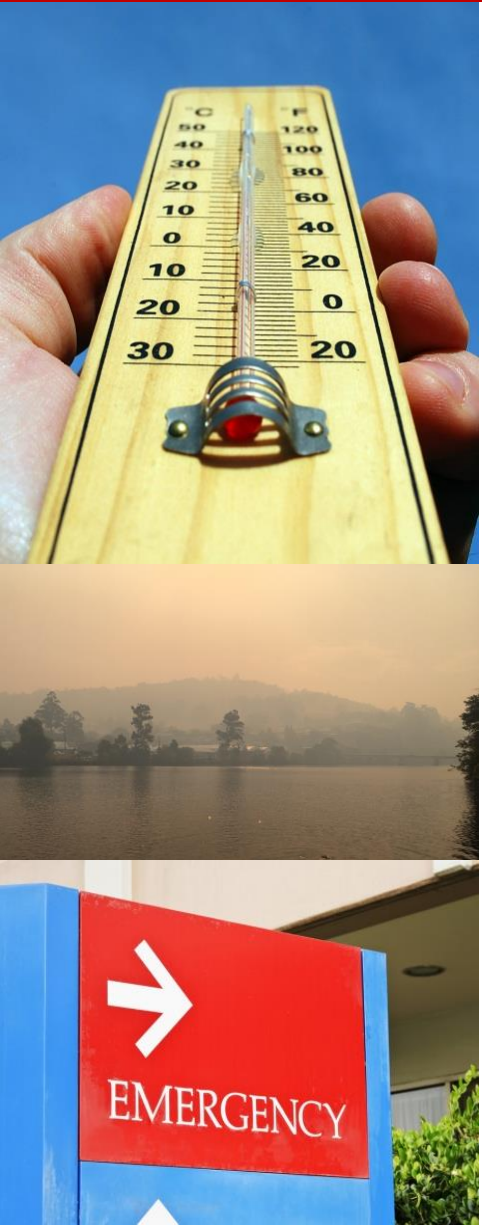
# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



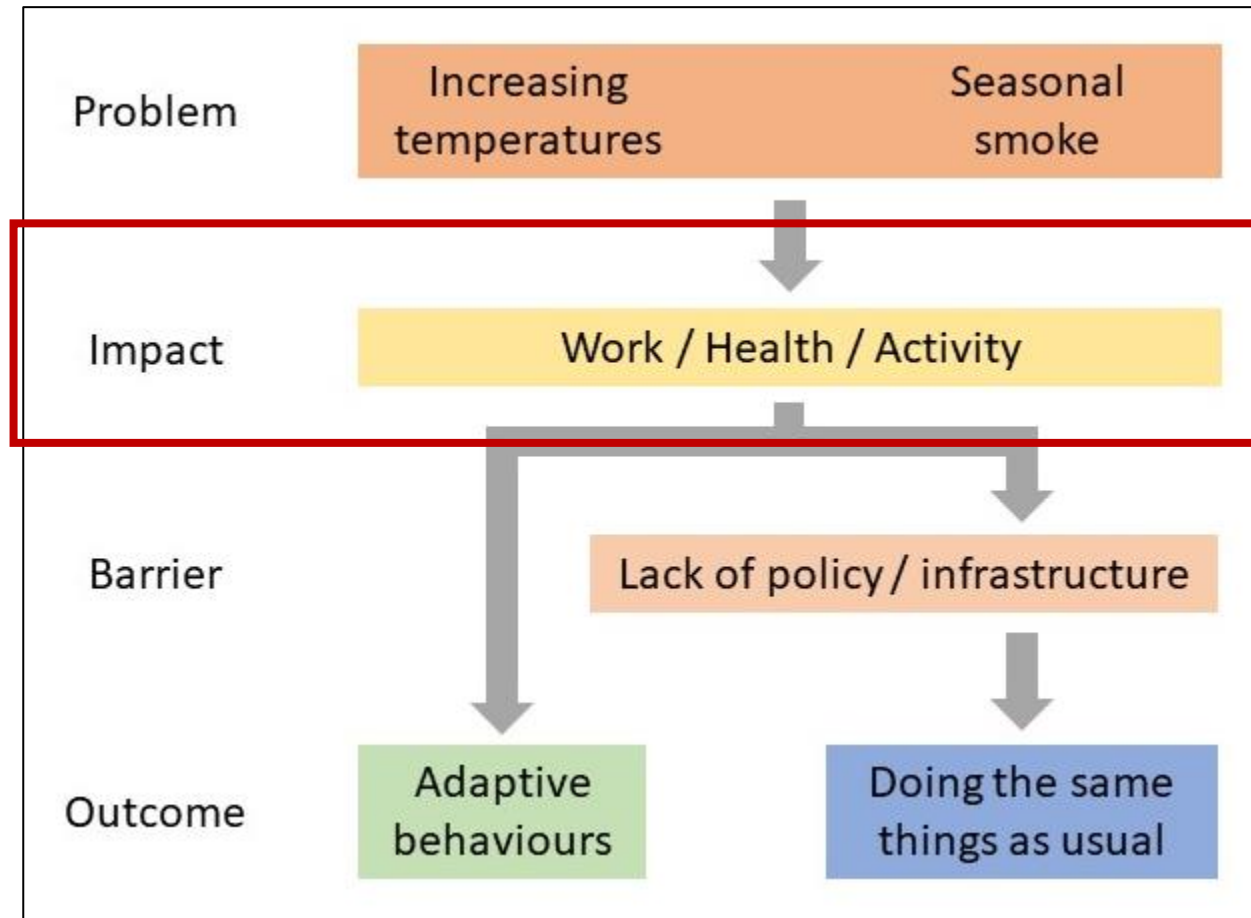
## What did we find out?



# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



## What did we find out?





# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



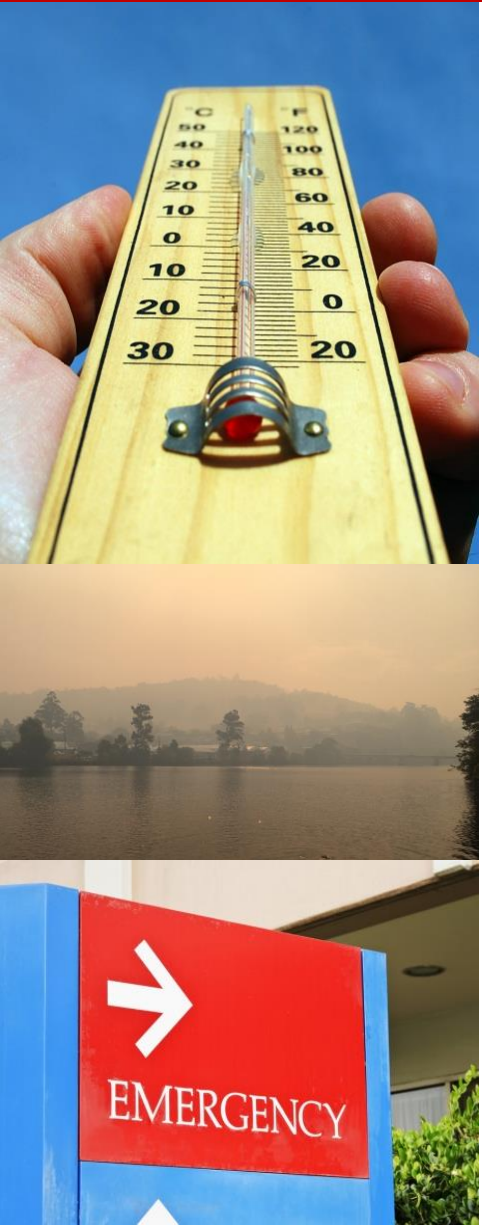
## Impacts on work, health and activities

*"I've had people who have lived in Darwin their whole life, first day on the job, **they go down with heat stress**. Yeah, it's a productivity thing as well, and if you're constantly being affected by heat stress, **it impacts on the relationships with the people that you work with...**"*

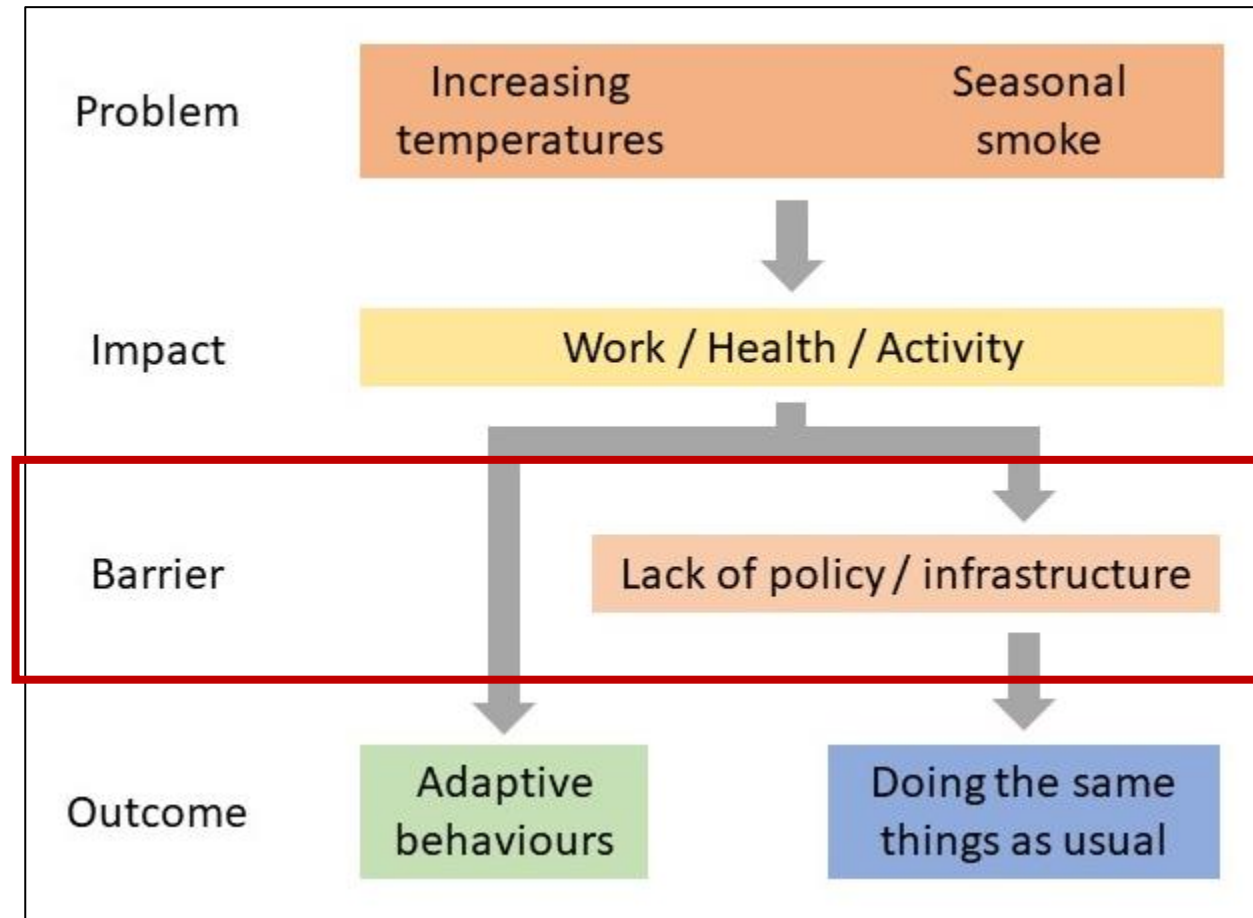
*"It's **anxiety causing**, very much so. So, stepping out into a smoky environment, it triggers something within me anyway, where oh my goodness if I'm not getting the air in, **it just exacerbates other feelings and sensations.**"*

*"It clouds your thinking as well, so when you get really hot, **you're finding it hard to think straight**, especially if you're dealing with anything that needs fine motor skills or coordination..."*

# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



## What did we find out?



# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



## Lack of policies and infrastructure for local conditions

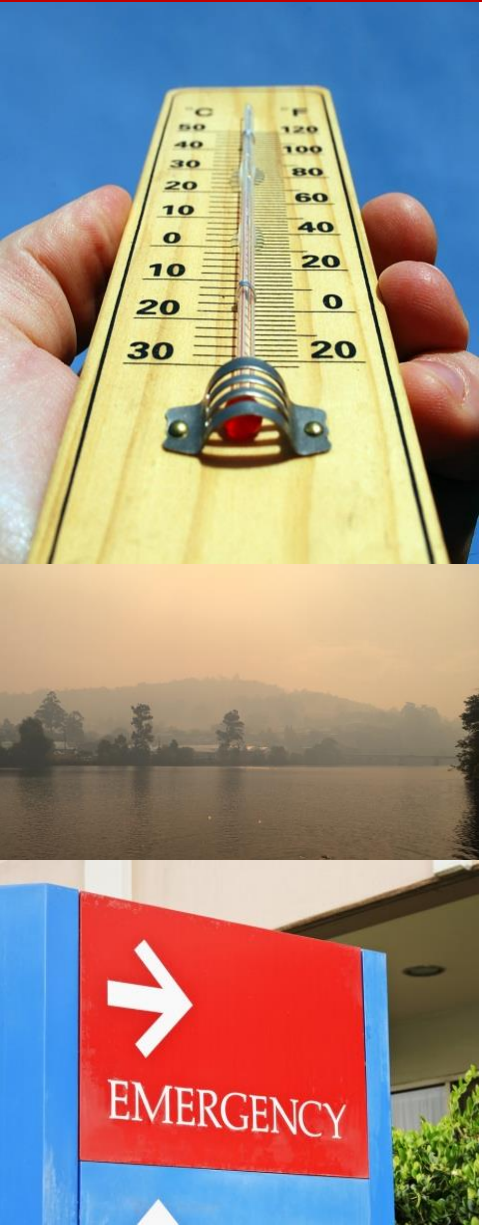
*“They changed it, because **the national policy would mean that we never played here.** So the scientists who came up with it originally, what was a good number to play to not damage whatever is getting damaged, they had to adjust it because we wouldn’t play above the 26th parallel. So they had to change it.”*

*“We definitely don’t have sufficient [shade]. I’m trying to cram them into shade whilst also being COVID safe. I’m like, ‘You there, you there.’ And it’s a nightmare. **I don’t know whether [to prioritise] heat or COVID.** So definitely more shade structures around the facility.”*

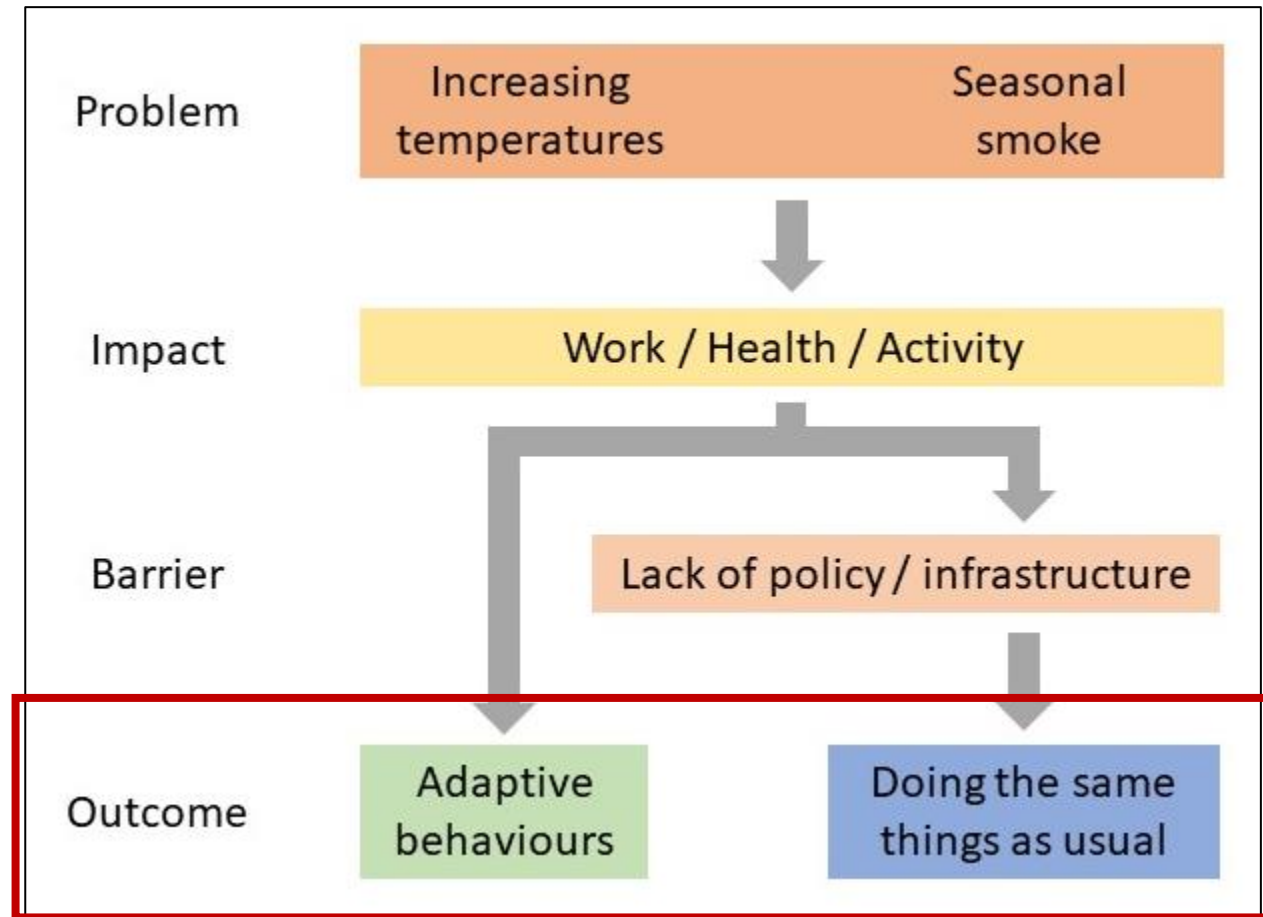
*“I think they just put it in the too hard basket to do a policy specifically for more tropical climates. Compared to the policy for the southern climates. Because even across the NT, that would be different as well...so, we’d need separate policies within the NT.”*



# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



## What did we find out?



# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



## Adaptive behaviours include:

- Finding shade
- Working at non-conventional times
- Water, ice and electrolyte intake/application
- Taking breaks inside A/C



# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



An expectation to keep doing the same thing, even though things are not the same...

*“The heat policy they have brought in up here, it’s only been around for four years. And so **they brought it out for a reason.** And they didn’t have one before that. **Because it’s just getting hotter.**”*

*“It’s actually not that hard to fix it. Just put them all on at night. But you have to break down, ‘Oh, hockey’s traditionally played on a Saturday afternoon. Or footy is a Saturday afternoon. **That’s what we’ve done for 150 years, footy.**’ Well, bad luck, you’re going to play on a Tuesday night now.”*

*“Darwin does have - it is changing slowly, but it does have that ‘we’re territory tough’ attitude. **“Oh yeah, doesn’t matter that it’s 37 degrees, get out there and work.”**”*

*“Because the standard response is, ‘Oh, we’ve been doing it here for 70 years,’ ...**I don’t think that stacks up.**”*



# Managing heat and smoke in the Top End: Stories from vulnerable people



## What does it mean?

- The risks of exposure to extreme heat and poor air quality are already high...and continue to increase
- There are specific gaps in policy and infrastructure that would support behaviour change to improve health outcomes
- Co-designed community projects are key to future solutions



**Thank you**

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