

3.4.1 Environmental factors

Queenslanders enjoy a relatively healthy physical environment. We have one of the safest food supplies in the world, the overall quality of our air and drinking water is good, and the built environment is generally clean and healthy. The quality of the physical environment cannot be taken for granted however, because there are regional differences.

Population health status is influenced by the interaction of social, economic and environmental health determinants.⁷⁰ The biological, physical and chemical environments have the potential to impact on health. The extent of this impact is modified by the scale and nature of human activities. Human activities include agricultural, industrial and energy production; the use and management of water and wastes; urbanisation; the quality of health services; and the extent of the protection of the living, working, and natural environment.

The impact of environmental factors on population health outcomes is difficult to assess due to the multi-factorial nature of many of the outcomes of importance. Thus, indicators relating exposure to environmental determinants and processes to manage such exposures are commonly used to measure the influence of the environment on health, rather than health outcomes indicators. The need for environmental health indicators was highlighted by the *National Environmental Health Strategy (1999)*.⁷⁰ Development of a national set of environmental health indicators is occurring. In future, indicators to monitor environmental health and quality data to support these indicators should be more readily available and more clearly defined.

For information on some key environmental factors that influence health, such as air quality, water quality, water fluoridation, food safety and security, healthy food access, physical activity environment, housing, household safety devices and homelessness, please refer to *Whole of population* chapter. Specific environmental factors relating to Indigenous health are described in the *Indigenous peoples* chapter.

There are other less well characterised environmental factors that have the potential to impact on health. Many of these factors have evolved from changes in our society and present new potential health risks. These include the changes in the way we manage our waste, changes in construction materials for our housing, issues relating to securing adequate and safe water supplies, increased urbanisation and urban densities, and global climate change resulting from increased greenhouse gas emissions. The extent to which these emerging issues impact on the environment and population health is not well characterised.