

# THE HEALTH COSTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

## How Canada can adapt, prepare, and save lives

As Canada moves beyond the COVID-19 crisis, governments have an opportunity to safeguard against future health threats. This is a critical juncture to redefine how public policy advances health and climate change adaptation.

The following recommendations provide a starting point based on our analysis of climate-related health risks on Canada's horizon:

### **1 All orders of government should implement health adaptation policies to address both the symptoms and root causes of climate-related health threats.**

Policies that tackle the symptoms of health impacts can play a clear role in reducing risks. For example, governments can enhance warnings about heat and poor air quality and ensure emergency response systems are primed for more extreme weather. Despite their benefits, however, health adaptation efforts that are limited to symptoms and proximate effects will ultimately be unable to keep up with growing and unpredictable climate change impacts. That means that governments should also implement policies that address the root causes of vulnerability and exposure to climate health hazards.

### **2 Canada's emerging national adaptation strategy should map all key adaptation policy levers across government departments and orders of government against top climate health impact areas.**

When developing the forthcoming national adaptation strategy, the Government of Canada should explicitly recognize the decentralized nature of health adaptation and resilience building. It should work with provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and local government partners to identify bodies that make policy decisions to improve health resilience. Mapping these accountabilities can help start the discussion about how to coordinate policy decisions that advance health adaptation across orders of government.

### **3 Central agencies in federal, provincial, and territorial governments should explicitly incorporate health resilience into climate lenses to inform cost-benefit analyses and policy decisions.**

All government departments should be directed to identify their role in climate change health adaptation and resilience and to take responsibility for those roles in departmental goals, projects and decisions. Departments should consider not just overall quantitative costs and benefits of alternative actions with respect to climate change health impacts but also the distribution of costs and benefits—recognizing that improving the circumstances of disadvantaged groups builds overall resilience.

### **4 Governments should invest in research on emerging, unknown, and local climate change health impacts.**

Successful health adaptation policy must address health risks broadly, not only the narrower set of impacts of climate change that are most studied. Broad risks include mental health impacts, the effects of changes in wildfire regimes on air quality and respiratory health, the vulnerability of health systems themselves to climate change and extreme weather, and the direct and indirect effects of ecosystem change on health and well-being. Provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and local governments should also invest in better understanding the regional and local health implications of climate change, including the exposure and sensitivity of disadvantaged groups.

This report is the second in the Costs of Climate Change series. Our first report, *Tip of the Iceberg*, provides an introduction to the known and unknown costs of climate change for Canada. Forthcoming reports will analyze the cost of climate change to Canada's infrastructure and the national economy.

For more information: [climatechoices.ca](https://climatechoices.ca)