

# Written Submission for the 2020 Pre-Budget Consultations: Canada and the Climate Emergency

By Upstream Institute for a Healthy Society and the Canadian Public Health Association

**Recommendation 1:** That the Government of Canada provide funding in the amount of \$5 million for the creation of an Interagency Climate Resilience Observatory to conduct a risk to housing assessment.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Government of Canada amend *The Insurance Companies Act* and Regulations in order to mandate that all insurance companies release their actuarial maps and data related to climate and natural disaster risks to the federal government and all public health units.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Government of Canada implement a *health-and-climate-in-all-policies* approach in relation to the federal budget and all new legislation.

## **Creating a Climate Resilience Observatory: Understanding the Risks**

Given the reality of the climate emergency we face as a nation and a world, we need a better understanding of the risks to key social determinants of health in Canada posed by climate change. There is, however, a chronic shortage of data available to public health organizations and civil society that properly forecasts climate hazards and risks to specific geographies and the health inequities resulting from this spatial distribution of risk. Therefore, public health organizations, community groups, and social agencies are operating blindly when it comes to the spatial risks of climate change in their jurisdictions. This is especially important for fixed social determinants of health like housing, water, and food.

The Canadian Public Health Association in its position statement on climate change calls for the Government of Canada to:

“Minimize the effect of climate change on the health of Canadians by:

- Undertaking local and regional climate change impact assessments, developing adaptation plans, and supporting best practice information-sharing between public health units in different regions of the country.”

Similarly, the Expert Panel on Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience stated:

“To effectively prepare for the health impacts of climate change, information about the risks posed by current climate variability, the possible impacts associated with future climate change, the unique vulnerabilities facing specific populations, communities or regions, and effective measures to protect health is required.”

The following recommendations are required to operationalize CPHA’s and the Expert Panel’s guidance in relation to housing. This allows the Government of Canada to properly assess the impacts of climate change on social and public housing that vulnerable communities rely on for shelter.

**Recommendation 1:** That the Government of Canada provides annual funding in the amount of \$5 million/annum for the creation of an Interagency Climate Resilience Observatory to conduct a housing risk assessment annually.

It is our proposal that the government should fund Statistics Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Renewal Corporation, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Employment and Social Development Canada to jointly create a climate risk assessment map that evaluates the location and climate readiness of social housing, vulnerable and historically marginalized populations in Canada in relation to higher risk areas for natural disasters and other climate hazards. This data will be released to all public health organizations in Canada to be used to assess the risk of funding deployed under the national housing strategy. Currently there is no monitoring of climate risk for housing investments made by federal or provincial/territorial departments or agencies in the National Housing Strategy.

Similarly, there is currently little data on the variability in climate risk experienced by different vulnerable populations. The Expert Panel recommended the Government of Canada track the proportion of low-income people living in climate hazard zones. The Expert Panel report stated:

**“2. Percentage of Canadians living on low incomes in climate hazard areas**

Income and social status influence individual and community capacity to adapt to climate impacts. When hit by climate hazards, people afflicted by poverty suffer great losses in terms of lives and livelihoods. The inequitable impact of climate hazards further aggravates existing socioeconomic inequalities and undermines the capacity of people to cope and adapt (pp. 22-23).”

Creating an Interagency Climate Resilience Observatory would allow the Government of Canada to properly assess ongoing climate resilience and adaptation efforts. This is crucial to proper emergency planning alongside adaptation.

A second data set crucial to mapping the hazards of climate change is the actuarial mapping and data that is collected by insurance companies. Access to this data would allow departments and agencies to better assess climate hazards and risks and develop appropriate public policy responses. It is in the public interest to expropriate this data annually for the public interest and therefore:

**Recommendation 2:** That the Government of Canada amend *The Insurance Companies Act* and Regulations in order to mandate that all insurance companies release their actuarial maps and data related to climate and natural disaster risks to the Government of Canada (for release to public health organizations).

## **Climate-and-Health-in-All-Policies**

We recommend the government reorient and reprioritize its metrics for assessing social and economic progress within the context of the climate emergency we are now experiencing. Giving health outcomes and emissions reductions equal weight as economic growth is a required step to properly mitigate climate change and adapt our health systems to already locked-in temperature rise.

The Canadian Public Health Association’s position statement on climate change recommends that the government, “*Integrate a health-in-all-policies approach to climate policy, identify health co-benefits associated with climate change policy, and integrate health equity impact assessments into ongoing policy decisions* (pg. 2, L. 51).” To operationalize this within the federal budget we recommend that:

**Recommendation 3:** That the Government of Canada implement a *health-and-climate-in-all-policies* approach in relation to the federal budget and all new legislation.

Health-in-all-policies are a framework for understanding how population health is affected by almost all policies decisions and programs within all departments and especially how socio-economic policy has a direct impact on health inequities and overall population health. *Health impact assessments* of policy and *health equity lens* on budgetary measures form some of the core aspects of a health-and-all-policies approach. Particular attention is paid to how the government's decisions are going to affect the social and environmental determinants of health of the affected populations. Given the pivotal role the federal budget plays in operationalizing the government's priorities, the potential positive impact of health impact assessments cannot be underestimated.

To implement this recommendation, the Government of Canada would reorganize the budget so that its balance sheet had three categories of analysis side by side. The dollars and cents, the carbon emissions eliminated or gained, and health impacts of each budget measure. The budget document would thereby inform citizens whether the plans of the Government of Canada detailed in the budget would result in Canadians getting healthier and cutting their emissions alongside the direct financial implications. Operationalizing this framework will require the reorganization of the budget development process to include close collaboration between Health Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and the Department of Finance. Each department would be required to assess the impact of budget measures within their scope of expertise.

The end result of this modified budget development process would be a comprehensive budget document that includes an accounting of the potential impact of proposed budgetary measures on the nation's carbon emissions and their impact on health inequities on a line by line basis.

In terms of longterm policy approaches, this would require the Government of Canada to integrate its strategies and frameworks into a single plan for the equitable transition away from a carbon-based economy. This overall plan must synthesize and reconcile the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change and Clean Growth, the annual budget, the Inclusive Innovation strategy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the National Housing Strategy, the Labour Market and Skills Strategy into a single comprehensive strategy that sets Canada on a path to submit a Nationally Determined Emission Inventory in line with doing our fair share to meet Paris Climate Agreement goal of limiting warming to less than 1.5 degrees; improves Canada's overall population health and closes health equity gaps; while promoting a healthy economy.

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