

Friday, June 19, Montreal

Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

131 Queen Street, Sixth Floor
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Canada

Dear members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology:

Subject: A Green Recovery Plan to Invest in our Health, our Communities and our Future

As we experience this health, social and economic crisis, the federal government has shown it is possible to act quickly and ambitiously to protect the common good and our collective health against COVID-19.

Much like the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change is a looming health crisis. The World Health Organization (WHO) currently recognizes that the climate crisis will be the most significant threat to global health in the 21st century, projecting more than 250,000 deaths per year starting in 2030—a mere decade away. Our government has a responsibility to protect the health of our communities. It is a driving force that must act now to prevent a climate disaster. We at **La Planète s'invite en santé** are sounding the alarm. As a collective of health care workers and students, we are submitting six priority recommendations for a recovery plan that puts Canadians' health, resilience and future first.

Preventing the next health crisis

Heat waves, forest fires and floods caused by climate change are, like COVID-19, forces with devastating effects. Not only do these natural disasters appear suddenly, killing many and causing significant economic damage in their wake, but they also threaten the physical and psychological health of entire communities, especially those most vulnerable. These threats must be met with rigorous preparation, a swift response from the health care system and a robust social safety net.

The health impacts of climate change are, like those of COVID-19, a curve that must be flattened. More and more people are being hospitalized and dying prematurely as a result of air pollution and increases in vectors of infection, allergenic plants, heat waves and extreme weather events caused by climate change. According to Health Canada, man-made air pollution is responsible for 14,600 premature deaths and, when combined with its non-fatal health impacts, economic losses of \$114 billion every year.¹

Like COVID-19, the climate crisis destabilizes the fundamental structures of our society. It increases food insecurity, weakens our economy and exacerbates social inequities. Canada's lack of thorough preparedness for COVID-19 has taken a terrible toll on its economy, costing the country billions of dollars, and—more importantly—thousands of lives. There is an important lesson to be learned: we must immediately invest in a low-carbon economy or face heavy casualties and dire economic consequences.² For example, in Quebec alone, projections indicate that the health impacts of climate change will result in 20,000 deaths and billions of dollars in economic losses over the next 50 years.³

¹ Health Canada, "Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Canada Estimates of morbidity and premature mortality outcomes," 2019. [Online: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2019/sc-hc/H144-51-2019-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2019/sc-hc/H144-51-2019-eng.pdf).

² Canadian Public Health Association, "Climate Change and Human Health," October 4, 2019. [Online: https://www.cpha.ca/climate-change-and-human-health](https://www.cpha.ca/climate-change-and-human-health).

³ Pilon-Larose, H. "Plus de vert, moins de béton, plaide l'Institut national de santé publique," June 30, 2018. [Online: https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/201806/30/01-5187786-plus-de-vert-moins-de-beton-plaide-linstitut-national-de-sante-publique.php](https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/201806/30/01-5187786-plus-de-vert-moins-de-beton-plaide-linstitut-national-de-sante-publique.php). [French only]

Recommendations

La Planète s'invite en santé is calling on you to invest in a green recovery plan. Here are our six priority recommendations to promote the health of Canadians, make them more resilient to health threats and significantly reduce health care costs.

1. **Introduce robust legislation to make Canada carbon-neutral as soon as possible.** This legislation should be based on evidence-based data and best practices in order to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
2. **Support the decarbonization of all of Canada's industries and provinces** by investing in active and electric public transportation, energy efficiency and renewable energy and by putting an end to all oil and gas exploration and development projects in Quebec.
3. **Incorporate health care savings** into energy transition cost analyses. The benefits for public health outweigh the health care costs, which are significantly greater than those related to implementing the transition.
4. **Invest massively in urban greening and local farming.** For example, earmarking 1% of annual infrastructure investments for urban greening would create better ecosystems that improve air quality, reduce heat, enhance biodiversity and contribute to our health.⁴
5. **Ensure public health receives ongoing, sufficient funding.** Public health is our safeguard against environmental threats, which, according to the WHO, are responsible for 25% of the burden of disease.⁵
6. **Provide financial and logistical support to the provinces to help them transition to carbon-neutral health care systems.** Health care and its supply chains account for close to 5% of Canada's emissions.⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how fast decision-makers and health care stakeholders can act when our safety and well-being are at risk. We now have the opportunity to invest in an economic recovery plan that prioritizes both the environment and the health of current and future generations of Canadians. The pandemic has been devastating, but the climate crisis will give us no respite.

Now is the time to act.

Yours sincerely,



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⁴ Close to \$33 billion in related costs, according to a report by the Ouranos network. Online: <http://www.environnement.gouv.qc.ca/changementsclimatiques/evaluation-impacts-cc-couts-qc-etat.pdf>. [French only]

⁵ World Health Organization (WHO), "Preventing Disease Through Healthy Environments," 2016. Online: https://www.who.int/quantifying_ehimpacts/publications/preventing-disease/en/.

⁶ Eckelman, M.J., Sherman, J.D. and MacNeill, A.J. "Life cycle environmental emissions and health damages from the Canadian healthcare system: An economic-environmental-epidemiological analysis," 2018, PLoS Med 15(7): e1002623. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002623>.