

**Bill C-12: An Act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050**

Brief submitted to the Environment and Sustainable Development Committee

2021 05 17

Authoring organizations

Doctors for Planetary Health - West Coast

Sustainabiliteens

Babies for Climate Action Vancouver, and Babies for Climate Action New Westminster

The Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development  
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6  
May 17, 2021

Dear members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development,

We are a coalition of physicians working on the public health impacts of the climate crisis in partnership with multiple groups of youth and young parents who are among the populations who will be most severely and permanently impacted. Climate change is a threat multiplier that disproportionately impacts youth, seniors, Indigenous people, racialized people, and vulnerable communities. The Lancet, the foremost international medical journal, states that “A child born today will experience a world that is more than four degrees warmer than the pre-industrial average, with climate change impacting human health from infancy and adolescence to adulthood and old age” without urgent transformative change.<sup>1</sup> The consequences to health are already severe. For example, recent studies show that a rapid transition away from fossil fuels will save an estimated 3 million lives per year.<sup>2</sup> Canada is heating at 2-3 times the global rate and Canadians are dying as a result.<sup>3</sup> As the Canadian Medical Association and the Lancet Policy Brief for Canada state: “An urgent transition to an environmentally sustainable, just and healthy society is an essential part of recovery that Canada and other countries must undergo.”<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen in other countries such as the U.K., climate crisis accountability legislation has the potential to ensure we eliminate fossil fuel emissions in line with the imperative to limit global heating to 1.5C. This recommendation stems from the IPCC 2018 report and is consistent with our Paris Agreement commitments. Bill C-12 is currently inadequate to reduce emissions at the level needed and protect public health.

We support strong measures to address the climate crisis consistent with the 1.5C imperative and urge the Committee to implement the following recommendations when amending Bill C-12:

1. **Set 2025 as the first milestone year.** Early accountability will reduce the burden of more intensive and possibly prohibitive actions that will be required should substantive action be delayed. Earlier action and accountability will increase predictability and transparency, and ensure Canada’s efforts are on track to meet future milestones.

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<sup>1</sup> Watts, N., Amann, M., Arnell, N., Ayeb-Karlsson, S., Belesova, K., Boykoff, M., Byass, P. et al. 2019. "The 2019 Report of the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Ensuring that the Health of a Child Born Today is Not Defined by a Changing Climate." *The Lancet* 394 (10211): 1836-1878.  
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)32596-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32596-6/fulltext)

<sup>2</sup> Lelieveld, J., Klingmüller, K., Pozzer, A., Burnett, R. T., Haines, A., & Ramanathan, V. 2019. "Effects of Fossil Fuel and Total Anthropogenic Emission Removal on Public Health and Climate. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences - PNAS*, 116(15), 7192-7197. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1819989116>

<sup>3</sup> P-Desrosiers, C., Hackett, F., McGregor, D., Banasiak, K. 2020. The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Policy Brief for Canada.  
[https://www.dropbox.com/s/07ixg5lu28h4dz1/Lancet%20Countdown%20Policy%20Brief%20Canada\\_ENG.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/07ixg5lu28h4dz1/Lancet%20Countdown%20Policy%20Brief%20Canada_ENG.pdf?dl=0)

2. **Ensure all greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets are legally binding.** To meet Canada's responsibilities to limit global heating to 1.5C and address the climate emergency that threatens all of society, we need legally binding targets. Including enforcement mechanisms will ensure the burden of reductions are spread over time and will begin to fulfill our emissions reductions commitments initiated in 1988.
3. **Increase the 2030 reduction target to 55% of the 1990 level;** this target is in-line with the European Union's target, announced in 2020.<sup>4</sup> Making this change would demonstrate to the world that Canada is serious about addressing the climate crisis and is keeping in-step with equivalent economies in terms of accepting responsibility and acting on it.
4. **Set 2040 as the national greenhouse gas net-zero emissions target year.** Canada has a notable responsibility because it produces the most greenhouse gases per capita in the G20. Canadians use four times the G20 average in buildings and transportation sectors. Therefore Canada has a much higher responsibility to make steeper reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. This would demonstrate Canada's commitment to the international community, justice, and equity.
5. **Establish three-year carbon budgets and reports,** with independent oversight, and consequences for overshooting budgets. Carbon budgets allow for planning across government using oversight and accounting structures mirroring existing financial systems. The UK's Climate Change Act is a model of how budgets can lead to meaningful reductions.<sup>5</sup>
6. **Require mandatory annual progress reports on Canada's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets** to inform planning and help Canadians adapt to a changing climate. Canadians need transparent reporting that addresses the scale and urgency of the crisis and clearly demonstrates Canada's progress in meeting the targets. Canadians want to understand the issues that will affect them, their families, and communities. The annual publication of a report will inform them of the steps being taken to mitigate further damage.
7. **Include within the Minister's assessment reports every five years, reporting on evolving climate risks and impacts** that can inform policy and carbon budgets. This additional information is important for planning, adaptation, and understanding the importance of mitigation efforts.
8. **Ensure that the advisory committee is composed of climate science experts,** with knowledge of the needs of the most impacted communities, and having no substantive conflicts of interest. In order for the advisory body to maintain public trust, it is crucial that it does not represent corporate interests and is free of conflicts of interest.

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<sup>4</sup> European Commission. 2020. *2030 Climate Target Plan*.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action/2030\\_ctp\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action/2030_ctp_en)

<sup>5</sup> U.K. Government Climate Change Committee. *Carbon Budgets and Targets*.  
<https://www.theccc.org.uk/topic/carbon-budgets/>

9. **Establish a Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change to work alongside the advisory panel.** The U.K. and France have already implemented their own assemblies<sup>6</sup> and a global one is planned ahead of COP-26. The assembly would serve as a non-partisan independent body representative of the wider population, asked to provide input to the advisory committee on the bigger questions and decisions that are needed. The assembly would be guided by experts in evidence-based climate science and economic mathematical modelling.

Sincerely,

Dr. Linda Thyer,

On behalf of Doctors for Planetary Health - West Coast, Sustainabiliteens, and Babies for Climate Action

#### **Summary of recommendations:**

1. Set 2025 as the first milestone year.
2. Ensure all greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets are legally binding.
3. Increase the 2030 national greenhouse gas emissions reduction target to 55% of the 1990 level.
4. Set 2040 as the national greenhouse gas net-zero emissions target year.
5. Establish three-year carbon budgets and reports, with independent oversight, and consequences for overshooting budgets.
6. Require mandatory annual progress reports on Canada's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.
7. Include within the Minister's assessment reports every five years, reporting on climate risks and impacts.
8. Ensure that the advisory committee is composed of climate experts, with knowledge of the needs of the most impacted communities and no substantive conflicts of interest.
9. Establish a Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change to work alongside the advisory committee.

#### **Authoring Organizations:**

Doctors for Planetary Health

As health professionals, we stand with the World Health Organization statement that climate change "is the greatest health threat of the 21st century". Having been on the front lines of the Covid-19 pandemic, we do not endorse this position lightly. By following the science we truly understand that we are on the edge of an irreversible situation which will impact the health and lives of our patients and communities. We are compelled to push for meaningful action in the hopes of preventing the catastrophic predictions made by climate science.

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<sup>6</sup> Carnegie Europe. 2020. *Getting Climate Citizen's Assemblies Right*.  
<https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/11/05/getting-climate-citizens-assemblies-right-pub-83133>

### Sustainabiliteens

As Canadian youth, our generation will be the most severely impacted by the lack of government action to stop the climate crisis today. For almost two years we have striked from school and flooded the streets in the millions holding our government to account and demanding bold climate action at the scale required to prevent catastrophe. We are children. We shouldn't have to do this. It's well past time for the government to start truly holding themselves accountable to youth and future generations by strengthening Bill C12, and to start tackling the largest crisis humanity has ever faced before it's too late.

### Babies for Climate Action

As parents, we know we must do everything in our power to protect our children's right to a healthy future and a stable climate. Our role is to keep them safe and to act as moral agents. The climate crisis is the biggest existential threat to our children, future family generations and our planet. Already, our children are living in a time of unprecedented biodiversity loss and have begun experiencing environmental disasters caused by climate change. It is the youngest amongst us and those not yet born who will bear the brunt of our choices today. We do not want our children to grow up in a time of unprecedented suffering and loss of life, including human life.