



# HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

The World Health Organization has identified climate change as the **biggest global health threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**. Here in British Columbia, climate change is clearly observable and many people are already feeling its effects. With some degree of climate change now **“locked-in”** regardless of mitigation efforts, climate change adaptation is necessary to ensure British Columbia will fare well in the future.

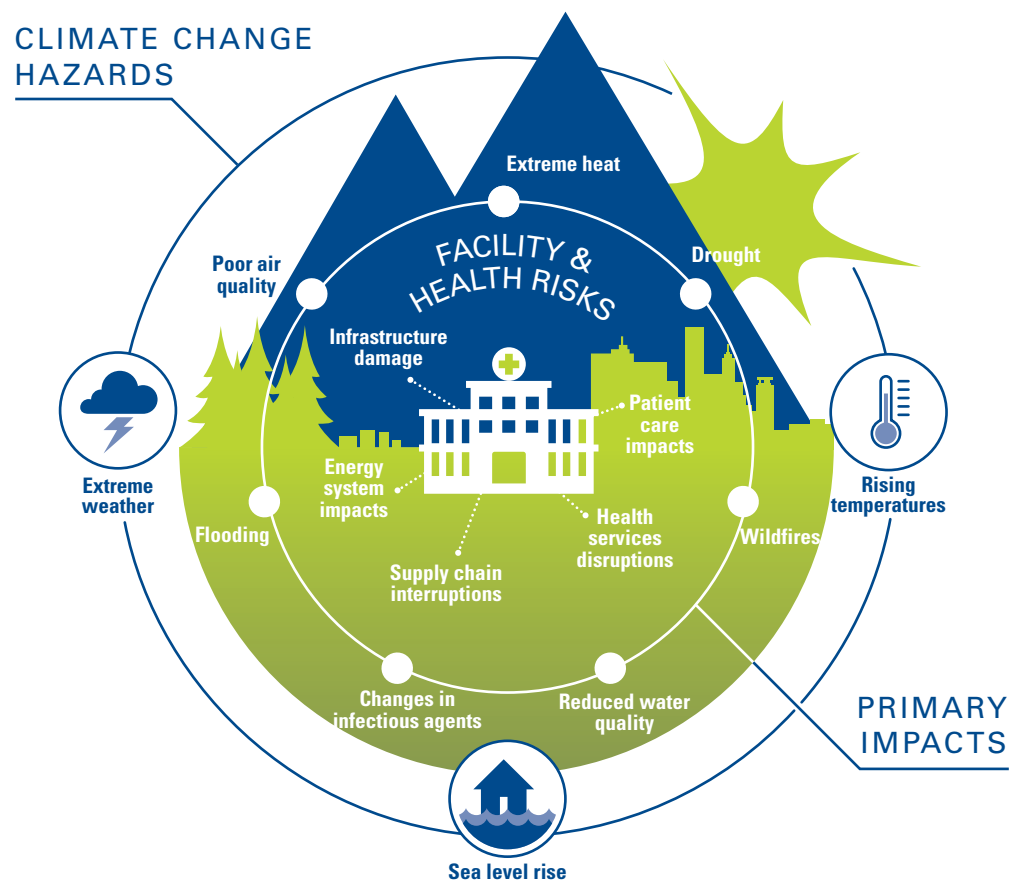
The challenge is significant, but British Columbia is well positioned to respond given strong capacity across different sectors. There are many specific actions that **health care energy managers, administrative leadership, and other facility operations staff** can take to adapt to climate change. These actions often fall within the day-to-day responsibilities of health care facility managers and leadership, and they also align with the goals of the larger health care community: improving health and well-being outcomes for all British Columbians.

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH

Climate change is likely to impact most areas of our lives, including our health. Individual and population health are influenced by wider social, cultural, economic and environmental factors. These factors are commonly known as *health determinants*, and they are closely linked to a range of health outcomes. Increasingly, **climate change hazards are impacting health determinants**. These impacts in turn influence and affect physical and mental health outcomes.

Climate change affects health care facilities in many ways. Recent heat waves, droughts and wildfires have generated or contributed to negative health outcomes, and impacted health care facilities and services, including damage to infrastructure, interruption of supply chains, and impacts to energy systems. Some of these risks are illustrated in the figure.

**Figure:** From climate change hazards to facility and health risks



**CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION OPPORTUNITIES**

Here are some actions that **health care facility managers, administrative leadership, operations and maintenance staff** can take to prepare for current and future impacts of climate change, and in so doing, support better public health outcomes. Acting today will strengthen our health care system and improve the resiliency of our communities.

**PLAN & PREPARE*****Climate Risk Assessment.***

- Check if your organization is working on a risk assessment. If not, identify the climate risks your facility may be exposed to and determine how well prepared it is. For example, is your facility located in a hazardous area subject to flooding or sea level rise? Is there sufficient operational capacity to maintain a safe work and care environment during a heat wave? The Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care has developed a Health Care Facility Climate Change Resiliency Toolkit, which health care facilities can use to assess their resiliency to climate change ([greenhealthcare.ca](http://greenhealthcare.ca)).

***Climate Adaptation Plan.***

- After completing a Climate Risk Assessment, develop a strategy to minimize risks and prepare your facility for both short and long-term climate impacts, and climate health emergencies.

***Green buildings and infrastructure.***

- More sustainable “green” buildings also tend to be more climate resilient in their design features (green roofs, passive cooling and heating systems, energy systems, etc.). Knowing how climate resilient your facility is can help identify retrofit options that reduce the potential for service disruptions.

**LEAD*****Take the 2020 Health Care Climate Challenge.***

- Global Green Healthy Hospitals' 2020 Health Care Climate Challenge is mobilizing health care institutions to protect public health from climate change, with specific actions oriented towards improving facility climate resilience. The group has over 800 members representing over 25,000 hospitals and health centres in over 40 countries. Check to see if your health care facility and/or health authority has joined the challenge. If not, consider how to make it happen.

**EDUCATE*****Educate and engage staff in climate change adaptation actions.***

- Support in-house communications and education on climate change risks and the actions your facility is taking to address them. Educated and engaged staff members are more likely to become involved in other climate change adaptation and mitigation activities in the community and at home.

***Start a staff engagement program to promote sustainability and resilience actions in the workplace.***

- A staff-centered program could offer resources on climate resiliency and opportunities to share practical advice. Island Health's (Vancouver Island Health Authority) Green Champions program, and the GreenCare Green+Leaders program administered by the three health authorities in the Lower Mainland, are two examples.

**MONITOR & EVALUATE*****Track the results of actions taken.***

- Are new systems or programs generating the intended results? Could they be improved? Share results and learning with other facility operators and planners.

**SUPPORT*****Identify and support local sustainability initiatives.***

- Support local government sustainability initiatives that generate co-benefits for health outcomes that could be supported through complementary actions on health care facility grounds. For example, local government urban greening programs help reduce local temperatures in summer months and improve air quality. Health care facilities can support these programs through tree planting and greening of facility grounds.