



# COMMUNITIES

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.

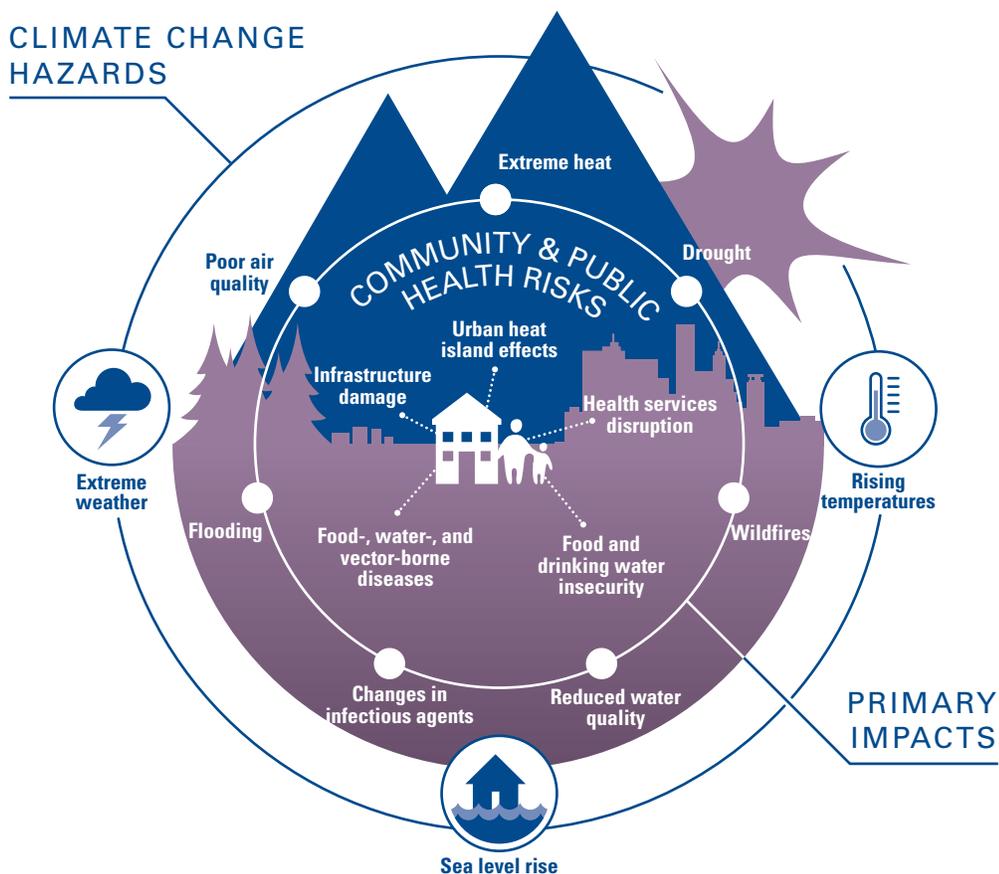
Climate change is impacting our communities and our health in complex and interrelated ways, but there are many actions **municipal and regional governments, elected officials, community planners, local government staff, and community groups** can take to reduce climate change-related health risks and improve community well-being. There are also considerable opportunities for communities and the health sector to work together, increase public support for adaptation initiatives, and improve health outcomes for 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 and community well-being.

Climate change affects public health and community well-being in many ways. In British Columbia, recent heat waves, droughts and wildfires have generated or contributed to negative health outcomes, including injuries and stress-related health issues. Food and water security has also been impacted and increases in both water-borne and insect-borne illnesses have been observed. Some of these risks are illustrated in the figure.

Figure: From climate change hazards to community and public health risks



## CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION OPPORTUNITIES

Here are some actions that **communities** 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 the resiliency of our communities and improve the health of people living in them.



### PARTNER & COLLABORATE

**Involve the health care community through the formal plan referral process.**

- Take advantage of the plan referral process to build relationships with health authority staff. This will help ensure that relevant policy chapters in official community plans and regional growth strategies (e.g., health and well-being, food security, water security, transportation, and GHG emissions reduction) are considered through a health lens, and include up-to-date information about climate change and health.

**Partner with neighbouring communities.**

- Work with neighbouring communities, including First Nations, to support one another, leverage and enhance capacity and strengths, and research local climate change risks.



### PLAN & PREPARE

**Engage the health care community in vulnerability and/or adaptation assessments.**

- Leverage the health sector's knowledge and expertise to ensure that any climate vulnerability and/or adaptation assessment includes a health lens. Ensure that assessments identify and understand vulnerable groups and their unique needs.

**Work with the health care community to develop climate emergency plans and protocols.**

- Expand emergency management programs to include climate-related events (e.g., floods, heat waves, wildfires) and involve representatives from the public health sector in their development.

**Include health data and health considerations in plans, policies, and programs.**

- Ask local non-governmental organizations, health authorities, and academic research partners to make findings from any local climate change and health research available for use in local planning initiatives, including climate action plans, community infrastructure plans, and healthy built environment programs.



### EDUCATE

**Integrate public health and climate change messaging in public communications.**

- Research indicates that people are more likely to act and/or support a climate change adaptation initiative when they are aware of its positive impacts on individual health. Integrate information on the health benefits of climate change actions into public education materials, drawing on the many existing resources from health authorities, Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Coalition of Green Health Care and others.

**Support public outreach and education.**

- Work with health authorities and other health partners (BC Healthy Communities, BC Healthy Living Alliance, PlanH) to organize a community open house about the linkages between climate change and health. Research indicates that the public views climate change as primarily an environmental issue and not a public health issue.

**Support internal education and capacity building.**

- Work with health authorities and other health partners to provide information and education materials for staff and elected officials on climate change adaptation and health. Educational materials can help to illustrate the co-benefits of applying a climate health lens in local government planning and help further "build the case" for climate action.



### MONITOR AND EVALUATE

**Include community health indicators in plan and program monitoring.**

- Work with the health care community to integrate climate change-related health outcomes in existing community monitoring programs. Some of the indicators may already be tracked by public health agencies.