



FRONTLINE HEALTH CARE

The World Health Organization has identified climate change as the **biggest global health threat of the 21st 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.

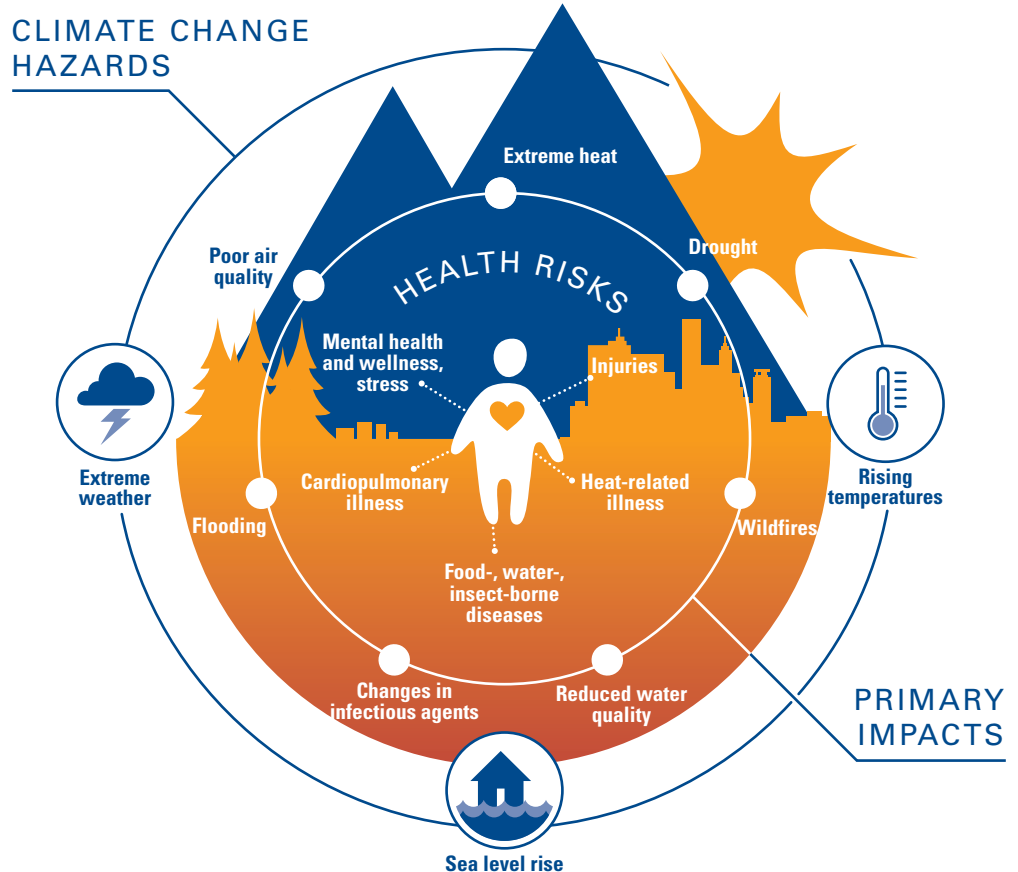
The challenge is significant, but British Columbia is well positioned to respond given strong capacity across different sectors. There are many specific actions that **physicians, nurses, emergency responders, patient care support services staff, and other frontline health care providers** can take to adapt to climate change. These actions often fall within the day-to-day responsibilities of frontline health care providers, and 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 frontline health care in many ways. In British Columbia, recent heat waves, droughts and wildfires have generated or contributed to negative health outcomes, including injuries, increased cardiopulmonary illnesses, and stress-related health issues. Some of these risks are illustrated in the figure.

Figure: Climate change impacts and health care risks



Studies suggest that by 2040, BC's wildfire season will last fifty days longer on average, and fires will be more frequent and severe. Wildfires exacerbate existing respiratory conditions such as asthma and emphysema.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION OPPORTUNITIES

Here are some actions that **frontline health care providers** 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

Understand the local vulnerabilities.

- Work with local public health leadership and emergency management personnel to complete a climate change vulnerability assessment that will help understand how best to prioritize adaptation actions.

Emergency preparedness.

- Does your office, team or department have a plan in place to maintain operations and respond to emergencies such as wildfires, heat waves, or disease outbreaks?
- Identify the climate risks that are relevant to your work, and develop strategies to overcome them (e.g., surge capacity plans, continuity plans).
- Include an integrated employee safety plan to ensure staff safety during a climate-related emergency.
- Ensure vulnerable populations are included in emergency response plans, including considerations during evacuation or displacement.

Climate health impact preparedness.

- Ensure frontline health care workers are properly equipped to diagnose and treat illnesses commonly exacerbated by climate change (e.g., stress and mental health issues, heat stroke, illnesses caused by water-borne pathogens, vector-borne diseases).
- Develop a monitoring, surveillance and notification program to alert health authorities when there are significant increases in visitation for climate change-related health issues.



PATIENT CARE

Educate.

- Place printed educational materials about climate change and health in offices, patient rooms, waiting areas, and common rooms, including brochures, factsheets, and posters.
- Health Canada's Environmental and Workplace Health unit (www.hc-sc.gc.ca) offers some useful climate change-specific public health information brochures.

Mainstream.

- Address health impacts of climate change in disease management and care protocols and patient education materials, such as disease management plans and discharge materials.
- Identify vulnerable individuals in patient practices for which specific advice/emergency plans should be developed.



ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CARE

Work with professional associations.

- Consider partnering with professional organizations such as Health Employers Association of BC, BCGEU, BC Nurses Union, and Doctors of BC on climate change and health initiatives (e.g., vulnerability assessments, capacity building and training).

Support climate-health education.

- Encourage professional associations, training providers and educational institutes (e.g., medical schools) to include materials and training on climate change and health.

LEAD & SUPPORT

Leverage your role.

- Take advantage of opportunities to speak about climate change health risks and adaptation strategies at professional, community and local government events and conferences.



Identify and support local and individual sustainability initiatives.

- Support local community climate resilience and adaptation programs.
- Support and encourage individual or personal activities, such as using transit, carpooling or active transportation, or supporting remote work opportunities like telemedicine and video/teleconferencing.