

2025 CLIMATE AND HEALTH POLICY PRIORITIES FOR CANADA

This document summarises key priority areas of focus for Canada, supported by evidence from the 2025 Global Report of the Lancet Countdown.

FUND AND IMPLEMENT THE NATIONAL ADAPTATION STRATEGY TO STRENGTHEN CANADA'S HEALTH SYSTEM RESILIENCE

1

Building on the National Adaptation Strategy (NAS)¹, Canada requires long-term, dedicated funding to strengthen health capacity across provinces, territories, and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.^{2,3} To meaningfully offer health protection, investments must integrate climate risk into preparedness plans, embed equity-based adaptation and mitigation, and upgrade health infrastructure,⁴ along with federal, provincial, and territorial action plans⁵ and transparent reporting.⁶

In 2024, people in Canada were exposed to 10.7 heatwave days each, on average. Of these, 6.5 (60%) would not have been expected to occur without climate change. (**Indicator 1.1.1**). These groups face the highest risks of dehydration, heat stroke, and cardiorespiratory illness, increasing demand for emergency and inpatient care. At the same time, 56% of Canada's land area faced at least one month of extreme drought annually, heightening wildfire frequency and smoke exposure. During 2020–2024, population-weighted PM_{2.5} from wildfires averaged 0.70 µg/m³, 172% higher than 2003–2012 (**Indicator 1.2.1**). During the 2023 fire season, severe smoke forced temporary closures of emergency departments in the Northwest Territories and disrupted primary-care services in British Columbia.⁷ These escalating hazards expose vulnerabilities across jurisdictions, highlighting the need for coordinated investment through the NAS to strengthen Canada's health systems and workforce resilience.

Health adaptation remains fragmented and underfunded, leaving structurally disadvantaged communities, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples⁸ and rural populations, disproportionately exposed to climate-related health risks. Building on the NAS requires sustained funding for (a) vulnerability and adaptation assessments across regional health authorities; (b) preparedness measures such as cooling and clean-air centres, surge staffing, and health risk communication⁹; and (c) embedded equity mechanisms co-governed with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis partners.

Complementary steps, such as creating a national education centre for planetary health and finalising federal-provincial-territorial action plans with transparent progress tracking, would strengthen NAS implementation. This capacity-first, equity-driven approach protects health, reduces inequities, and builds readiness for accelerating impacts of climate change.

APPLY MANDATORY CLIMATE-RESILIENCE AND LOW-CARBON STANDARDS TO THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUND

2

The Affordable Housing Fund¹⁰ offers an opportunity to require all federally supported new builds and retrofits to meet climate-resilient, low-carbon standards. To maximize health benefits, projects must meet benchmarks for thermal safety, smoke-resistant ventilation, flood and fire resilience, and energy efficiency (e.g., electric heat pumps).^{11,12} Prioritising households facing disadvantage and climate risk, and integrating nature-based cooling, would protect vulnerable groups, lower energy costs, and reduce pressure on Canada's health systems.¹³

As shown earlier (**Indicator 1.1.1**), exposure to extreme heat is increasing among older adults in Canada. Poorly insulated or inadequately cooled housing amplifies this exposure, heightening vulnerability to illness and mortality during prolonged heat events. In 2023, tree cover loss in Canada reached 8.6 million hectares, more than triple the loss recorded in 2021 (**Indicator 3.4**), reducing natural shade that helps moderate neighbourhood heating and limit indoor overheating. Wildfire activity (**Indicator 1.2.1**) and smoke infiltration degrade indoor air quality, compounding these risks. In Canada, an estimated 357,758 people live less than one metre above sea level (**Indicator 2.2.4**), leaving low-lying coastal housing increasingly exposed to flooding. Together, these hazards underscore growing risks to housing and health and highlight the need for federally mandated, climate-resilient design.

Canada can address these risks through the Affordable Housing Fund by requiring: (a) building-level thermal safety through passive cooling, high-performance envelopes, and electric heat pumps; (b) smoke-resistant ventilation with filtration to reduce indoor particulate matter during wildfire events; (c) flood resilience through site selection, elevation, and backflow prevention; and (d) fire-resistant materials and defensible space in high-risk zones.

Embedding electrification and deep energy-efficiency standards within the Fund can also cut emissions, reduce energy poverty, and ensure public investments deliver long-term health and economic benefits. Directing federal housing finance toward climate-resilient, low-carbon construction would safeguard health, improve affordability, and strengthen Canada's preparedness for escalating climate-related risks.

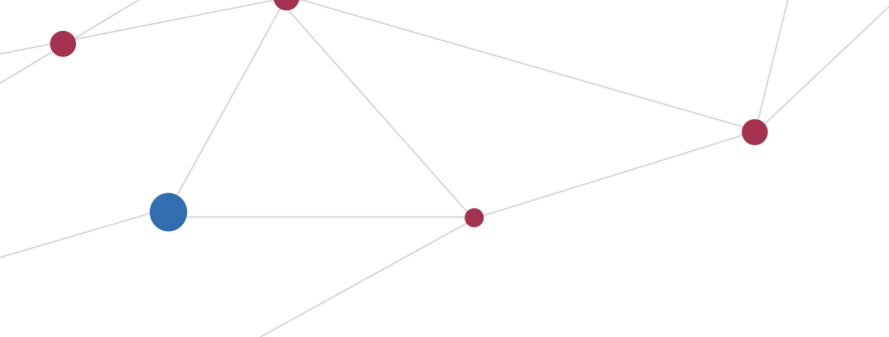
IMPLEMENT AND ENFORCE STRONGER FEDERAL METHANE REGULATIONS TO PROTECT HEALTH

3

Strengthening and enforcing federal methane regulations, particularly in the oil and gas sector, alongside accelerated electrification of end-use sectors, would deliver rapid climate and health benefits.

Methane is a short-lived but highly potent climate pollutant, with over 80 times the global heating potential of CO₂ over 20 years.¹⁴ Because it contributes to ground-level ozone formation, reducing methane can deliver rapid health and climate benefits, including fewer cases of asthma, respiratory illness, and premature mortality.¹⁵

Methane reduction represents one of the fastest and most effective opportunities to advance Canada's climate change commitments while improving air quality. The oil and gas sector is the country's largest methane source, highlighting the need for robust regulation and transparent monitoring.^{16,17}



Federal regulations can include: (a) quarterly leak detection and repair (LDAR) at all facilities, with monthly inspections and rapid repairs for super-emitters¹⁸; (b) continuous monitoring of hydraulically fractured wells and related infrastructure¹⁹; (c) a ban on routine venting and flaring, with mandatory gas capture or electrification²⁰; (d) standardised public reporting and penalties for non-compliance; and (e) independent verification to ensure accountability.²¹

Complementary measures can limit methane leakage across end-use sectors. In 2022, 94.7% of transport energy and 48% of household energy came from fossil fuels, mainly natural gas (43.9%), demonstrating strong potential for electrification (**Indicators 3.1.2, 3.1.3**). Expanding clean-heating technologies, electric vehicles, and energy-efficient retrofits would reduce methane leakage and ground-level ozone, protect respiratory health, and accelerate progress toward a low-carbon energy system.

Accelerating Action

Integrating health across Canada's climate change policies can strengthen preparedness, drive adaptation, and cut emissions. Climate-resilient housing will ensure thermal safety, smoke protection, and affordability, while stronger methane regulations will lower ozone and improve respiratory health. Together, these priorities can deliver rapid health gains, reduce inequities, and build a climate-resilient, equitable future.

References

1. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/climate-plan/national-adaptation-strategy/full>
2. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/11786302241298789>
3. <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-12-452>
4. <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-024-19459-w>
5. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/climate-plan/national-adaptation-strategy/action-plan.html>
6. https://www.oagbvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_cesd_202506_01_e_44647.html
7. https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/sites/ecc/files/resources/1_nwt_wildfire_response_review_report_and_appendices_final_compressed-9k.pdf
8. <https://changingclimate.ca/indigenous-resilience/chapter/6-0/>
9. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/state-public-health-canada-2022.html>
10. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/project-funding-and-mortgage-financing/funding-programs/all-funding-programs/affordable-housing-fund>
11. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8378816/>
12. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC155901/>
13. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(25\)00141-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(25)00141-0/fulltext)
14. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>
15. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10631284/>
16. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/climate-plan/reducing-methane-emissions/faster-further-strategy.html>
17. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/canadian-environmental-protection-act-registry/review-methane-regulations-upstream-oil-gas-sector.html>
18. <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab6ae1>
19. <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-methane-tracker-2024>
20. <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4433/13/3/385>
21. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590332223001951>

Contributors

The concept for this brief was developed by the Lancet Countdown, Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Nurses Association, and Canadian Public Health Association.

This document was written by Laura Myers, MA (Canadian Medical Association), Kim Perrotta, MSc (Canadian Public Health Association), and Émilie Tremblay, RN, PhD(c) (Canadian Nurses Association). Critical review and comments were provided by Robb Barnes, MA, Sehjal Bhargava, MD, CCFP, Ian Culbert (Canadian Public Health Association), Danille Diaz, MD, Sarah Lowden, MMgmt (Canadian Medical Association), and Amanda Mongeon, BES, MEd, PhD. Review on behalf of the Lancet Countdown was provided by Mahnoor Saeed, MPP and Elise Digga, MPH.



For more of the latest data on health and climate change, you can find country data sheets by scanning the QR code.