

CLIMATE CHANGE AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA: HEALTH IMPACTS



Unprecedented, intensified, rapid, and widespread climate change is affecting all regions of the globe. Warming temperatures will have severe effects on the health and well-being of humans and the ecosystems upon which they depend in the absence of scaled up adaptation efforts. The Health of Canadians in a Changing Climate: Advancing our Knowledge for Action report assesses the latest research and knowledge on the effects of climate change on health and health systems, including populations most at risk of these effects. Chapter two of the report, Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada, provides an overview of key health impacts and the role of Indigenous 1 knowledges and rights in climate action and knowledge gaps.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada are uniquely sensitive to the impacts of climate change

Climate change will affect all Canadians, but the distribution of these impacts and related health risks are not equal. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples are uniquely sensitive to the impacts of climate change because of their:

- · close relationships with and dependence on land, waters, animals, plants, and natural resources for their sustenance, livelihoods, cultures, identities, health and well-being;
- tendency to live in geographic areas already experiencing rapid climate change, especially Northern Canada; and
- greater existing burden of health inequities compared to non-Indigenous populations in Canada and related determinants of health, including the historic and ongoing effects of colonization and social and economic marginalization.



¹ The terms 'Indigenous' and 'Indigenous peoples' are used here to refer to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada, as defined in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution of 1982.



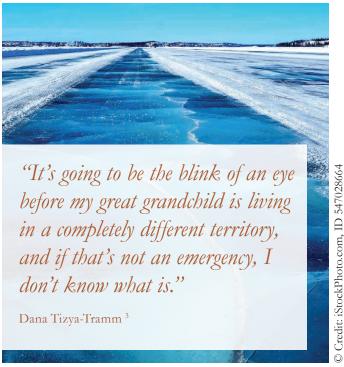
The health impacts of climate change on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples are interconnected and far-reaching

The impacts of climate change on the land, and on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples' relationships to the land, are already evident in communities from coast to coast to coast, not just in terms of physical health, but also emotional, spiritual, psychological, and cultural well-being. These health impacts, summarized in the table below, are interconnected and far-reaching, from increased food and water insecurity and infrastructure damage, to threats to personal safety and mental health, all of which are experienced differently within and between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis men, women, boys, girls, and gender-diverse people.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples have been actively observing and adapting to changing environments in diverse ways since time immemorial

Indigenous Peoples have unique and diverse knowledge systems and practices, passed down from one generation to the next, that have enabled them to respond, adapt, and survive changing environments for millennia. Applying these systems and practices to the growing threat of climate change and its related health risks will support more robust mitigation, adaptation, research, and policy in Canada and internationally. It will require addressing key knowledge gaps, such as how health impacts differ within and between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and geographies, while taking into account their rights and responsibilities over their lands, natural resources, and ways of life.





² Natan Obed, as quoted in Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK). (2016). *Inuit Priorities for Canada's Climate Change Strategy: A Canadian Inuit Vision for Our Common Future in Our Homelands*. Ottawa, ON, page 28.

³ Dana Tizya-Tramm, as quoted in Avery, H. (2019). Old Crow, Yukon, declares climate change state of emergency. CBC News, May 21. Retrieved from https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/old-crow-climate-change-emergency-1.5144010.

Health impact or hazard category: Impacts on First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and communities ⁴

Climate-related causes	Possible health effects
Increased wildfire, drought, and flooding events	Air quality health impacts (e.g., respiratory and cardiovascular diseases)
Instability and melting of permafrost and changes to ground snow cover, sea ice extent and thickness	Increased water and foodborne diseases Mental health impacts (e.g., stress, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder)
Changes to sea levels and weather patterns	Increased injuries and deaths from accidents (e.g., natural hazards and extreme weather events)
Higher exposure to climate risks in relation to natural and built environments (e.g., poor housing, water, sanitation, and environmental contaminants)	Increased direct and indirect health impacts from permafrost- related infrastructure damage
Decreased availability, quality, quantity and health of traditional food sources	Exacerbation of health and socio-economic inequities Exacerbation of chronic and infectious diseases
Melting and damage to ice roads	Food and water insecurity due to decreased access to, and quality of land, waters, plants, animals, and natural resources
Effects of warming and changes to precipitation patterns that affect survival and transmission of disease-causing organisms	Decreased opportunities for transmission of Indigenous knowledges and land skills, particularly among youth, affecting sense of identity, mental well-being, and cultures
	Temporary or long-term evacuation or displacement of populations from traditional territories, disrupting lives, creating financial hardship, and affecting mental well-being
	Impacts on health and infrastructure (e.g., restricted or delayed travel for health and emergency services, access to medical supplies, and patient safety)

⁴ National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH). (2022). Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada. In P. Berry & R. Schnitter (Eds.) *Health of Canadians in a Changing Climate: Advancing our Knowledge for Action.* Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada.

HOW TO USE THIS FACT SHEET

REFLECT

Talk to others in your community, reflect on the content of this fact sheet, and contemplate how you could make a difference in the health and well-being for yourself, your family or your community.



ENGAGE

Find local friendship centers, community organizations or groups where you can volunteer or participate in healthy positive actions. You too can share knowledge and make a difference in the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples' of Canada.

sharing knowledge · making a difference partager les connaissances · faire une différence

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The NCCIH uses an external blind review process for documents that are research based, involve literature reviews or knowledge synthesis, or undertake an assessment of knowledge gaps. We would like to acknowledge our reviewers for their generous contributions of time and expertise to this fact sheet.

Une version française est également publiée sur le site ccnsa.ca, sous le titre : Les changements climatiques et les peuples autochtones au Canada: répercussions sur la santé.

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