Lessons Learned: Canada’s HealthADAPT Program

PAHO/Canada Workshop on Building Climate Resilient Health Systems in the Americas

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Photo Credits: Sabrine Dinia
Canada’s climate is warming rapidly in ways that affect health

Canada’s Changing Climate Report 2019

Widespread warming in Canada is causing significant impacts on the environment and people’s health and wellbeing, including:

• More frequent and intense extreme hot temperatures;
• Increased severity of extreme heat events;
• Less extreme cold;
• Increased risk of drought
• Increased risk of wildfires
• Increasing length of the growing season;
• Reduced seasonal lake ice cover across the Arctic;
• Reduced sea ice extent;
• Thinning of glaciers; and
• Warming and melting of permafrost

(Bush & Lemmen, 2019)
Climate change is increasing risks to the health of Canadians

Berry et al., 2022

https://changingclimate.ca/health-in-a-changing-climate/chapter/1-0/
How can we ensure all people are resilient and protected?
Health Canada is building climate-resilient and low-carbon health systems

- **HealthADAPT** is a multi-year program introduced in 2019, to support projects at local, regional, and provincial and territorial levels of the Canadian health sector to prepare for and respond to the impacts of climate change.

- HealthADAPT invested approximately **$3.5 million in partnerships** to support 10 health authorities across five provinces and territories to conduct climate change and health vulnerability & adaptation assessments.

  The projects selected represent the diversity across the country, including:
  - Indigenous Peoples
  - Newcomers
  - Urban/rural/coastal communities
  - Health sector spectrum (i.e., provincial/territorial ministries of health, regional/local health authorities, public health units)
  - Official language communities

https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/programs/health-adapt.html
Increased understanding of local vulnerabilities including health equity considerations
Climate change impacts on Indigenous health systems

• **First Nations Health Authority**: project assessed climate change impacts on Indigenous marine food safety and vulnerability of BC Coastal First Nations to develop local and Indigenous specific adaptation strategies.
  • Combined citizen science, Indigenous Knowledge and research to support adaptation, culturally and locally appropriate means of risk communication and community health, climate resiliency, and food security.
  • Adapts traditional food harvesting and sea food storage techniques for climate resilience.

• **Northwest Territories Dept. of Health Social Services**: project included meaningful engagement from all 33 NWT communities including Indigenous communities.
Addressing health equity impacts

- Health equity was a consideration in the program, but the application of health equity as a consideration varied among projects.

- Social determinants such as income, education, employment, and housing influence health outcomes. Addressing these determinants is essential for adequately considering health equity in project work.

- Health equity considerations can be used:
  - As a lens for data collection
  - To inform adaptation actions/plans
  - To identify pilot communities

Population features that influence vulnerability and adaptive capacity, as well as populations of concern from the climate change impacts on health include:

- Gender and sex
- Race and ethnicity
- Age (including: elderly people and children)
- People with pre-existing conditions (e.g. physical and mental health conditions)
- People who are unemployed or underemployed
- People who are socially isolated
- People with lower socio-economic status
- People with lower levels of formal education
- People who are underinsured or uninsured
- People who live in high-risk geographic environments (e.g. flood plains, coastal communities)
- Newcomers to Canada
- Indigenous Peoples
- Occupational groups (e.g. outdoor labourers and first-responders)
- Minority linguistic communities
- Rural, urban, and suburban communities

Schnitter et al., 2022
HealthADAPT Program Lessons Learned

- Having clear objectives
- Importance of engagement
- Integrating lessons learned from COVID-19
- More focus on prevention and preparation for extreme weather events
- Adaptation as an iterative approach
- Having adequate staff capacity
Canada’s current plan to address these challenges is articulated through the National Adaptation Strategy

The **National Adaptation Strategy** is a whole-of-society roadmap for building a resilient Canada

**Provides an overarching vision** for resilience in Canada

All of us living in Canada, our communities, and the natural environment are resilient in the face of a changing climate. Our collective adaptation actions enhance our well-being and safety, promote justice, equity, and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and secure a thriving natural environment and economy for future generations.

**Underpinned by guiding principles** for fair, inclusive, and equitable adaptation

- Respect jurisdictions and uphold Indigenous rights
- Advance equity and environmental justice
- Take proactive, risk-based measures to reduce climate impacts before they occur
- Maximize benefits and avoid maladaptation

**Includes transformational goals, objectives, and targets** under five key systems including **Health and Wellbeing** (led by Health Canada).

The final National Adaptation Strategy was released on June 27, 2023.

The Government of Canada Adaptation Action Plan is the federal contribution to implementing the National Adaptation Strategy

The GOCAAP includes new investments to support Health and Well-being

Protecting the Health of Canadians from Extreme Heat (Health Canada): $29.9M over 5 years

- New investments build upon existing programs and will support efforts to enhance the evidence-base and develop federal guidance to support actions to make indoor environments safe from extreme heat; develop climate-ready heat health interventions; scale up the implementation of adaptation efforts; and foster heat resilience in at-risk communities across Canada.

Climate-Resilient and Low-Carbon Health Systems (Health Canada): $13M over 5 years

- Renews Health Canada's HealthADAPT program first launched in 2018 to support health authorities in identifying and addressing climate risks. Health Canada will renew and expand the resources, guidance, data, information, and the promotion of adaptation strategies tailored to local needs to support health systems to assess and adapt to climate change.

Thank you!

For more information, please visit canada.ca/health-adapt or

Email us at hc.climate.health.adaptation-adaptation.climat.sante.sc@hc-sc.gc.ca