

Climate Change is a Threat to Mental Health

HEALTH OF CANADIANS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE: SCIENCE ASSESSMENT 2022

The current burden of mental ill health in Canada is likely to rise as a result of climate change. With more than 7.5 million Canadians experiencing mental health problems each year, the potential increase of mental ill health outcomes is very large.

Climate change hazards that can affect the mental health of people in Canada include:

Acute hazards

- floods
- storms
- extreme heat events
- wildfires
- hurricanes

Slow-onset hazards

- drought
- sea-level rise
- melting permafrost
- secondary impacts of climate hazards such as economic insecurity, displacement, and food and water insecurity

Mental health impacts of climate change on Canadians may include:

- exacerbation of existing mental illness such as psychosis
- new-onset mental illness such as post-traumatic stress disorder
- mental health stressors such as grief, worry, anxiety, and vicarious trauma
- a lost sense of place, which refers to the perceived or actual detachment from community, environment, or homeland
- disruptions to psychosocial well-being and resilience
- disruptions to a sense of meaning in a person's life, and lack of community cohesion
- distress



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- higher rates of hospital admissions
- increased suicide ideation or suicide
- increased negative behaviours such as substance misuse, violence, and aggression

Climate change disproportionately and inequitably affects the mental health of specific populations

People most affected include:

- First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples
- women
- children
- youth
- older adults
- people living in low socio-economic conditions (people experiencing homelessness)
- people living with pre-existing physical and mental health conditions
- certain occupational groups, such as land-based workers and first responders

Given the current high costs of mental illness to society, and the breadth of mental health impacts that are related to climate change, future costs borne by Canadians and health systems will increase without increased adaptation.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples face unique challenges from the mental health impacts of climate change and in their efforts to adapt

In many Indigenous communities climate change is affecting the availability and quality of fresh water, traditional foods and key resources that affect emotional, mental and spiritual health and well-being and contribute to the disruption and denigration of cultures, knowledge and ways of life. Unequal access to mental health care services and facilities and ongoing colonialism and racism challenge efforts to adapt successfully.

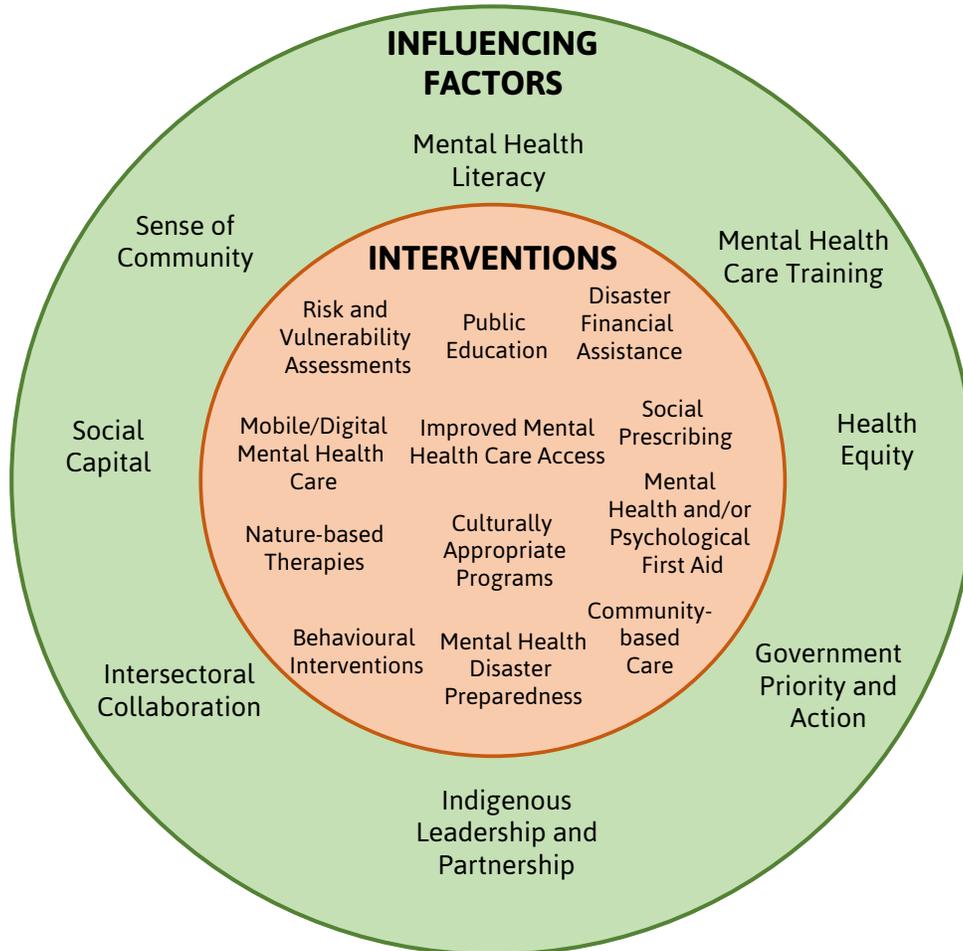
First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples may draw upon cultural approaches to mental health care, for example, land-based healing which brings people out on the land to create, craft, cook, share stories and connect with the land and with culture.

Health professionals have a key role to play in preparing for the mental health impacts of climate change

Important roles in adapting are held by physicians, nurses, mental health specialists (e.g., psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists), allied health professionals (e.g., public health workers, pharmacists, social workers, community mental health workers) and, emergency preparedness professionals (e.g., first responders).



Adaptation to the Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change



Helpful resources

- [Is this how you feel?](#)
- [Field guide to climate anxiety: How to keep your cool on a warming planet](#)
- [Climate and mind](#)
- [Ecoanxious stories](#)
- [Project InsideOut](#)
- [First Nations, Métis & Inuit hope for wellness help line](#)

Source

Hayes, K., Cunsolo, A., Augustinavicius, J., Stranberg, R., Clayton, S., Malik, M., Donaldson, S., Richards, G., Bedard, A., Archer, L., Munro, T., & Hilario, C. (2022). Mental Health and Well-being. In Berry, P., & Schnitter, R. (Eds.). (2022). [Health of Canadians in a Changing Climate: Advancing our Knowledge for Action](#). Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada.

