

Environmental Justice and Climate Change

Climate change is causing unprecedented extreme weather events and the related impacts are taking a rising toll on people's health and security. However, the burdens and risks posed by worsening climate change are not borne equally across all sectors of the population.

"Climate change is real. It is caused by greenhouse gas emissions resulting from human activities, and it poses a grave threat to humanity's future."

Supreme Court of Canada, *Reference re Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act* (2021) SCC 11

Climate Change Stats

- The buildup of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere has warmed the planet by approximately 1 degree Celsius on average since the pre-industrial period, with global temperature now increasing at the rate of 0.2 degree Celsius per decade.
- If all human-caused GHG emissions ceased immediately, the Earth's climate would still heat up by several tenths of a degree Celsius because of the latency time between GHG accumulation in the atmosphere and warming in the Earth's climate system.
- Devastating impacts of climate change will become more pronounced as the Earth's climate warms to levels approaching and exceeding 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Climate Change - Under-resourced communities experience:

- Significantly higher siting of polluting industries and waste facilities, leading to a higher incidence of chronic health conditions and increased vulnerability to extreme heat events.
- Less investment in critical climate-change adaptation and mitigation infrastructure, such as stormwater management, flood intervention and building retrofitting.
- Higher levels of food insecurity, further exacerbated by extreme weather events causing adverse impacts on local soil, water and wildlife.
- Higher incidents of long-term boil-water advisories and reduced access to clean drinking water.
- Lower-income communities have less greenscape and tree canopy, critical to weather disaster resilience.

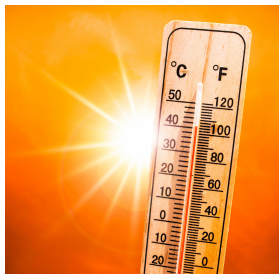
“Climate change is the biggest global threat to human health.”
World Health Organization, Special Report on Climate Change and Health

Reports



[Health Canada "Who is Most Impacted by Climate Change?"](#)

Notes that Indigenous and racialized populations in Canada are at a higher risk of being harmed by the impacts of climate change due to existing disparities which include adverse effects of industrial resource extraction, infrastructure vulnerabilities, higher food costs, and historic and ongoing burdens of colonialism.



[Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023 Report](#)

Confirms that low-income persons and communities are being disproportionately impacted by climate change. Increases in extreme heat events have resulted in higher rates of human mortality and morbidity, and a raised risk of food-borne, water-borne and vector-borne diseases.



[Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment \(CAPE\)](#)

"From the decision approximately 60 years ago to offload pulp mill effluent into Pictou Landing First Nation's pristine Boat Harbour, and toxic landfills placed in the African Nova Scotian communities of Shelburne and Lincolnville, to mercury contamination in Grassy Narrows First Nation, and exposures from petrochemical facilities by Aamjiwinaang First Nation in Chemical Valley in Ontario, the legacy of environmental racism can no longer be ignored".



[United Nations Declaration on Right to a Healthy Environment](#)

UN recognizes the need to acknowledge environmental injustices, "close protection gaps and empower people, especially those that are in vulnerable situations, including environmental human rights defenders, children, youth, women and indigenous peoples".



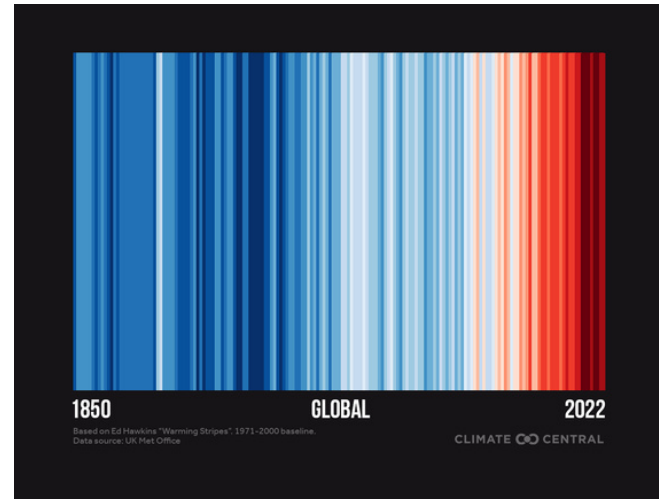
“Climate change is happening now and to all of us. No country or community is immune. And, as is always the case, the poor and vulnerable are the first to suffer and the worst hit.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres

Climate Central - Show Your Stripes

The global warming stripes are a simple visual representation of the long-term rise in global temperatures due to human-caused climate change.

Each stripe represents the global temperature averaged over one year, from 1850 to 2022. Red stripes are years that were hotter than the 1971-2000 average; blue stripes are years that were cooler.



Indigenous Lens

Compared to non-Indigenous people, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples face greater challenges from climate change impacts on health due to existing disparities.

Heightened Risk Factors for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples include:

- higher food costs
- high incidence of long-term drinking water advisories
- adverse health effects from industrial resource extraction
- remoteness and isolation
- historic and ongoing burdens of colonialism
- close cultural connection and dependence on a natural environment stressed by climate change
- infrastructure vulnerabilities in housing and flood management
- Unique legal, governance and service structures for Indigenous Peoples and communities



Right to a Healthy Environment for All

Current Initiatives

The proposed [Bill C-226](#) would be Canada's first legislation to address environmental racism. It requires the government to examine the links between racialization, socio-economic status and environmental risk.

The *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* recognizes a right to a healthy environment, and confirms the Government's commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Canada's National Adaptation Strategy

"Adaptation efforts must act to advance environmental justice. This includes addressing and minimizing social, gender, racial and intergenerational inequities and prioritizing those populations and communities at greater risk of climate change impacts."

UN Declaration on the Right to a Healthy Environment

"Simply affirming our right to a healthy environment is not enough. The General Assembly resolution is very clear: States must implement their international commitments and scale up their efforts to realize it. We will all suffer much worse effects from environmental crises, if we do not work together to collectively avert them now". - **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet**

"Governments have made promises to clean up the environment and address the climate emergency for decades but having a right to a healthy environment changes people's perspective from 'begging' to demanding governments to act". - **UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, David Boyd**

