

# Climate Risks- Engaging People Vulnerable to Climate Impacts

## Summary of Key Findings on Extreme Heat & Smoke

EVERGREEN  
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Evergreen engaged 546 people vulnerable to climate change impacts, including seniors and residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. This included individuals who are homeless and/or marginally housed, to better understand their **lived experiences, needs, values and preferences** during extreme heat and smoke events. **Nearly half** of the community members consulted indicated that they **had a physical or mental health condition**, and **almost 15% said they were homeless or living in a temporary shelter**. Of those who said they were homeless, **nearly half self-identified as Indigenous people**. 21 community stakeholders, including **senior-level staff and frontline service providers were also engaged** to provide context, suggestions on appropriate engagement activities, and to share their experiences working with groups vulnerable to climate impacts.

"Access to water [drinking water and washrooms] is going to be, for sure, the biggest pinch point in terms of people managing their own minute-to-minute needs throughout the day. That can be kind of a complicated one. There is all that stuff that goes along with it in terms of hygiene, and cooling, and washing, and using the washroom, and keeping the public spaces hygienic for the other people in the street and in the community."

-Community service provider

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Access to clean, well-maintained drinking water and washrooms** are needed both indoors and outdoors where people live, and where they access services.
- **Tree cover** is needed above seating in parks, on streets where people wait in line for services, and along main streets where people walk. Trees must be maintained to prevent fallen branches and uneven sidewalks from roots. Outdoor spaces provide important opportunities for socializing, reducing isolation and building climate resilience.
- **Indoor cooling spaces** need to be tailored to each particular group while also meeting their needs (e.g. for homeless individuals, this includes space for shopping carts, belongings and pets; and for seniors, quiet spaces with activities).
- **Cooling and air ventilation** should be provided in spaces where people already access services, such as community centre program rooms, shelters, overdose prevention sites and not-for-profit housing sites.
- **Landlords, building managers of public and not-for-profit housing and community partners** need to monitor and be aware of the health impacts of building design for new and old buildings during extreme heat and smoke, and empowered and supported through funding and tools. This may include the City relaxing building regulations or advocating for climate adaptations to be addressed in building regulations, and City-sponsored bulk-buying to provide necessary cooling solutions such as ventilation through windows and doors, air conditioning and filtration, misting stations in courtyards etc.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the City consider segmenting “groups of people vulnerable to climate impacts” to develop cooling adaptations that address the distinct, culturally specific needs within various communities and socio-cultural groups including people with mental health and addictions issues, active seniors, frail seniors, people living with disabilities, and individuals from diverse cultural groups. A Reconciliation lens should be used to address the needs of Indigenous people.

It is recommended that the City consider the needs of people most vulnerable to climate change impacts when mapping urban heat islands and designing programs to increase tree canopy.

It is recommended that the City consider three main issues with respect to cooling rooms and shelters: 1. **Location** in a nearby space comfortable for community members, with free transportation that can accommodate people with disabilities, mobility restrictions and visual impairments. 2. Each room may need to offer programming and amenities for **groups of people with similar needs and interests**. 3. The locations, hours and programming in each cooling room should be **communicated using the higher-touch principles** described by community members, such as direct communication from staff, announcements in structured programs, outreach to residences, shelters and areas where homeless people stay.

It is recommended that the City focus infrastructure planning on providing access to drinking water and washrooms in public locations where people gather, including lineups to access services during extreme weather events.

It is recommended that the City use an equity lens to revisit policies and bylaws governing buildings in the context of climate adaptation. **Placemaking principles** should be used in building design, including the ability to fully open windows and doors and have air conditioning as appropriate, while accommodating the ways in which a space will be used by people vulnerable to climate impacts. This includes accommodations for **cooling and ventilation, safety and security, chronic health conditions** including mental health issues, and **disabilities, mobility restrictions and visual impairments**.

### COORDINATION OF RESPONSES

It is recommended that the City:

**Monitor Special Weather Statements** via the BC Centre for Disease Control, Office of Emergency Management and Environment Canada

**Work with City-affiliated agencies and broadly across different community organizations and networks** to raise awareness and provide guidance around responses during extreme weather

**Initiate a coordinated response** targeting people vulnerable to climate impacts during extreme weather events

**Provide funding and resources** to support community-based responses during extreme weather events

## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Senior’s tea and coffee events –  
workshops and dialogue sessions –  
Canada Fun Day Event – Drop-in programs  
for seniors and homeless individuals –  
Ladies’ night event – Lunch and learn –  
Autumn fair – Summer block party –  
Conversation clubs – Urban forest walk

A facilitated survey of 306 community members took place at 9 LOCAL EVENTS, in addition to 9 ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES with 240 participants, which were tailored to each group and were conducted in 5 different languages. Activities were designed in consultation with community agencies serving those groups, built on existing activities at locations familiar to people, and focused on topics of interest to each group.