

SUBMISSION



**CANADIAN
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The Canadian Nurses Association is the national and global professional voice of Canadian nursing, representing 135,000 nurses in all 13 jurisdictions across Canada. CNA advances the practice and profession of nursing to improve health outcomes and strengthen Canada's publicly funded, not-for-profit health system.

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Recommendations

1. Invest in strategies to prevent and mitigate the negative health effects of climate change
2. Improve availability, quality and timeliness of health information related to climate change
3. Promote health-care innovation and expand technology infrastructure
4. Increase awareness among Indigenous populations of the effects of climate change, with a focus on First Nations, Inuit and Métis people



The following submission is joint between the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and the Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association (CINA). CINA's aim is to improve the health of Indigenous Peoples by supporting Indigenous nurses and by promoting the practice of Indigenous health nursing. Together, our submission highlights the impacts of climate change on all Canadians, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.

The missing links in Canada's climate transition

Over the last few years, Canada has begun transitioning to a low carbon economy, mainly by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. CNA believes that during this transition, more needs to be done to both understand the health impacts of climate change and support the health system's ability to respond. In particular, Canada lacks data and research on climate change, making it difficult to analyze and track its effects on health.

The connections between health and the environment — including air, water and food quality — are well known. However, how these effects manifest themselves is constantly changing. It is imperative that nurses understand how multiple environmental factors can influence health so they can consider them in their practice. Climate change can lead to heat stress, water- and vector-borne diseases, mental health afflictions, cardiopulmonary-respiratory disorders and death.

Canadians trust nurses and value their expertise. We believe that the public expects nurses to be aware of and know how to promote Canadians' health in the context of environmental health issues. This is accomplished through nurses' roles in clinical practice, education, research, administration and policy. Nurses are also in a strong position to advocate for those who are particularly vulnerable, including those with physical or behavioural differences or those who are unable to control their immediate surroundings. Indigenous nurses are the primary point of contact with the health system in these communities and are challenged on multiple levels as they provide care that supports Indigenous priorities, concerns and traditions.

The federal government has a leading role in ensuring the health sector is prepared for climate change impacts. The government needs to take immediate action — such as conducting risk assessments — to increase the health-care system's resiliency. The government should also integrate climate impact research into health policy decisions; increase public awareness and education on the negative health impacts; and increase funding toward research and best practice to fill data gaps and facilitate the sharing of



information between regions. The government also needs to increase awareness among Indigenous populations of the effects of climate change while, at the same time, engaging with Indigenous leaders and communities to share best practices. Finally, the government can be a leader in ensuring all health professionals have the tools they need to educate themselves, their patients and the public on the impacts of climate change.

Part of the solution is a robust information infrastructure. As information increasingly becomes available online, the federal government needs to ensure that all Canadians have access to fast, reliable, high-speed internet. Internet access has become a necessary part of our day-to-day lives and the federal government has a responsibility to develop a national broadband strategy that is affordable for all who live in Canada.

As Canada's digital economy expands, so too does the opportunity to expand health technologies. People are moving away from traditional care models and want to receive care in their home and community. Many technologies exist today to support such a transition. Federal investments need to be made in technology-enabled virtual care to ensure that all people receive the right care at the right time. Virtual care is an interaction between patients and their health-care providers using information and communications technology such as smartphones, tablets and other devices. Virtual care models also help to support rural and remote communities who may face difficulty accessing health services.

Recommendations

1: Invest in strategies to prevent and mitigate the negative health effects of climate change

There are numerous public health threats related to climate change. These threats have far-reaching implications for health and emergency preparedness. While the timing of emergencies cannot be predicted, extreme temperatures, weather events, flooding, and fires across Canada require increased emergency capacity. In addition, climate change has implications for infectious disease transmission. The effects of climate change are continuously shifting, and continuous public education is needed. Nurses are uniquely positioned to support mitigation efforts. They have the necessary scientific background and communication skills to explain the effects of climate change to the public. Their expertise in health promotion and behaviour change also equips them to encourage lifestyle choices that support health under changing climatic conditions.



CNA proposes:

- 1.1 Invest \$25 million to increase Canada's capacity to respond to the health impacts of climate-driven infectious diseases by improving the health-care system's adaptability and resiliency, increasing surveillance and monitoring activities, and providing access to education awareness tools. Doing so would enable:
 - i. Health professionals, including nurses, to have the information they need to provide accurate guidance and advice to their patients on climate-driven infectious diseases. With this information, nurses can provide preventive solutions to patients that can help to keep costs down by keeping patients healthy.
 - ii. Individuals and communities across Canada to have the tools to protect themselves from the health risks associated with climate-driven infectious diseases, particularly those that are borne by animals, food and water
- 1.2 Invest \$6 million for research on the mental health impacts of climate change and psychosocial adaptation opportunities.

2: Improve availability, quality and timeliness of health information related to climate change

A greater emphasis needs to be put on understanding climate change and its anticipated health impacts on individuals and communities across Canada. Assessing the health impacts of climate change requires data-gathering coupled with analytical methods to quantify the effects of, for example, extreme weather events, diseases and worsening air pollution. To guide policy development for climate change adaptation and mitigation we need a central and standardized way of collecting this data.

CNA proposes:

- 2.1 Coordinate and standardize pan-Canadian and inter-jurisdictional surveillance and reporting of climate-related health impacts (e.g., heat-related deaths), develop knowledge translation strategies to inform the public, and generate clinical and public health response plans that minimize the health impacts.
- 2.2 Mandate and provide \$10 million to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) to collect and report related data.



3: Promote health-care innovation and expand technology infrastructure

The Canadian health-care sector is changing. Advances in emerging technologies are creating new opportunities for innovation and leading to disruptions of traditional health-care models and processes. Patients are using these technologies and taking greater control over their health and well-being. For example, technology plays a central role in the home care sector, enabling remote patient monitoring and interventions in a patient's home. Virtual care is enabling timely access to health assessment and treatment in rural and remote communities. This new type of care represents an opportunity to reach people across Canada who face difficulty accessing health services. However, these technologies need to be supported through fast and reliable internet access in all communities across Canada.

CNA proposes:

- 3.1 Expand and develop funding programs that scale-up technology-enabled virtual care in homes and communities by:
 - i. Utilizing the Health Care Policy Contribution Program to invest in virtual care models that expand existing virtual services and resources for home and community care
 - ii. Assisting jurisdictions to accelerate and deploy technology to support operational functions of home and community care
- 3.2 Connect all Canadians to high-speed internet by 2030 by investing \$7 billion to develop and implement a national broadband strategy that is affordable and that will connect 100 per cent of homes and businesses with minimum internet speeds of 50/10 Mbps, including rural and remote communities.

4: Increase awareness among Indigenous populations of the effects of climate change, with a focus on First Nations, Inuit and Métis people

The Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association (CINA) believes that addressing the effects of climate change on all aspects of Indigenous environments will help to identify and improve health outcomes. Indigenous nurses are the primary point of contact with



the health system in these communities and are challenged on multiple levels as they provide care that supports Indigenous priorities, concerns and traditions. The effects of climate change are particularly felt by those living on traditional lands (especially Elders, youth, women) as access to resources and traditional foods is negatively affected. The lack of information and resources available on the internet hinders efforts to fully understand the extent of the problem. Even if sufficient information was available, current infrastructure does not provide for adequate connectivity for Indigenous populations to obtain information that is directly related to their communities.

CINA proposes:

- 4.1 Increased design, development and implementation of promotional and preventive measures that resonate with Indigenous populations
- 4.2 Engagement from Indigenous leadership and communities to provide direction on the planning of best practices that meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples
- 4.3 Provision of adequate resources that allow Indigenous health-care providers to develop resources, toolkits and plain language services that will allow for additional research and tracking of the impacts of climate change on Indigenous populations

