

Climate Change and Health: from knowledge to action

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Over the last decade, Northern communities as well as climate change researchers have begun to understand the degree to which climate change is impacting the health of Northern peoples in Canada. Climate change is not just an environmental issue but it is becoming very much a human health issue. The health implications resulting from a warmer and more unpredictable climate are not distributed evenly: current health status, age, gender, genetics, geography, and economics, are some of the key variables affecting the ability of individuals and communities to adapt to and reduce the effects of climate change.

To help address these issues, it is important to support First Nations and Inuit communities in conducting their own research and in developing adaptation plans/tools. Health Canada, as a part of the federal government's overall climate change strategy, has implemented a community-based program since 2008 that aims to build capacity in climate change and health research as well as to develop adaptation plans and relevant communication materials at the community, regional, and national levels.

Since the launch of the Climate Change and Health Adaptation Program, Health Canada has funded 37 community-based projects across the Canadian North. Research topics that link climate change and health issues include food security, water quality, health awareness/education, traditional medicine, land erosion and land use, and ice safety and monitoring.

A significant component of the Program has been data management and best practices. The federal government funds community-based projects and, once all the documentation for successful application for funding has been received, requires only final activity and financial reports. The research findings and results are owned by the communities who generate the information. The Program does realize, however, the importance of community-based participatory research and is working with communities on data management so that research findings and results can be compiled and disseminated (final reports, etc.) in a way that can affect evidence-based policy decisions within the federal and other levels of government.

Overview of results from these projects as well as the approach that the Program has taken to address community-based participatory research and data management will be discussed in the presentation.

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