

## Symposium

### “Climate change and health impacts in Canada: Strategies and tools to understand risk and build resilience”

“It’s clear we have an adaptation sprint.” —Courtney Howard

#### Speakers

**Dr. Katie Hayes**, Senior Policy Analyst, Health Canada (Moderator);

**Dr. Courtney Howard**, Emergency Physician, Yellowknives Dene Territory;

**Ms. Birgit Isernhagen**, Program Planning and Evaluation Officer,  
Ottawa Public Health;

**Dr. Elaine Barrow**, Senior Advisor, Environment and Climate Change Canada,  
Canadian Centre for Climate Services

## Key Takeaways

- Changes to climate are having broad impacts on human health worldwide. This includes direct effects like **heat-related illness** and **infectious disease**, and indirect effects such as loss of home, conflict and war.
- In this symposium, an emergency physician, a planning officer and a climate data scientist shared strategies to help Canada **mitigate and adapt**. For example, we heard about including climate change in medical education programs, building cool air shelters to prevent heat-related illness, and updating heat wave warning criteria.
- Comprehensive data from [ClimateData.ca](https://climate-data.ca) is available to inform **community adaptation planning**. The Northwest Territories and Ottawa have used the site’s data to plan for climate-related health risks.

## What We Heard

#### Courtney Howard

### “Climate change and health in Canada”

- Dr. Howard detailed the range and severity of climate-related impacts to health and health care, from asthma due to wildfire smoke, to storms damaging medical facilities, to decreased crop yields causing malnutrition.
- These impacts aren’t limited to physical health and infrastructure. Shifts in climate make people feel “worried and disconnected from the land” (Dr. Howard). In Canada’s North, Indigenous elders witnessing rapid changes to the ice, trees and food sources like Caribou and fish are experiencing eco-anxiety and climate grief.
- Dr. Howard encouraged a planetary health view. She emphasized that we can only staff, supply and build the complex structures of our health care system when our soil, water, climate and energy sources are stable.

## What We Heard

### Birgit Isernhagen

#### “Practitioners’ experiences of using climate information to assess community and health system vulnerability to climate change”

- Ms. Isernhagen shared climate adaptation plans from Ottawa Public Health and the Northwest Territories.
- Data from Environment and Climate Change Canada helped the Northwest Territories plan for climate-related health risks in Zak’s Harbour and Ulukhaktok. There, Zoe Guile and team proposed several mitigation strategies, including clean air shelters, fire-smarting, community freezer programs and flood zone mapping.
- Ottawa Public Health recently assessed climate-related health risks such as heat, vector-borne diseases, air quality, and water and food-borne diseases. Ottawa also created a heat vulnerability assessment for the city. Heat mitigations could include better cooling in low-income neighbourhoods, rental unit bylaws and emergency plans.

### Elaine Barrow

#### “Climate change and health impacts in Canada: Strategies and tools to understand data and build resilience”

- Heat wave warning criteria were recently modernized. A humidex of 40 Celsius was the previous standard but now Canada uses region-specific warnings. Four or five per year seem to be “the sweet spot” (Dr. Barrow).
- When Health Canada issues a heat warning, health authorities activate response plans. This might include opening air-conditioned cooling centres and providing outdoor workers with more breaks and water.
- [ClimateData.ca](https://climatedata.ca) is a wealth of information for planning. Anyone can use the site to view temperature, precipitation and other climate variables by location, future emissions scenarios and more.

## Explore Further

If you’re involved in community or health care system planning, you can adapt data variables from [ClimateData.ca](https://climatedata.ca) for your location and needs. Or use the [ClimateData.ca Feedback button](#) to ask questions about the website’s datasets or climate change in general.