

Addressing Health and Climate Change in BC

by Erica Crawford | March 16, 2016

Growing numbers of public health professionals are speaking up about the toll climate change could take on human health. BC Healthy Communities (BCHC) is supporting the health sector to learn about, develop and implement meaningful and effective approaches for engagement and collaboration on climate change, specifically, the links between climate change and health.

Interior Health Public Health Rounds

In January, Stacy Barter and Erica Crawford from BCHC joined the Interior Health Authority's monthly Public Health Rounds session to speak about the potential impacts of climate change in BC for human health, and the role of the health sector in adapting to those changes. They provided context by presenting information on the projected changes to climate, hydrology and ecosystems in BC and the Interior Health region, and an overview of the types of impacts this may have on human health and the healthcare system.



The overview included findings from BCHC's 2013 study, [Health Authority Perceptions and Capacity for Action: Health Impacts of Climate Change in BC](#). The study surveyed health authority professionals across the province about how they perceive the health effects of climate change, respond to climate change in their work and build capacity and collaboration to address the impact across the healthcare system.

Local Examples

The discussion then turned to Tanja Stockmann, Environmental Sustainability Manager with IH, to share the inspiring work that is happening within the health authority to reduce their carbon footprint and build capacity to address impacts and adapt to climate change. [BCHC Champion, Dr. Sue Pollock](#), was part of the session - asking participants to provide direction and recommendations for next steps.

Participants from across IH offered examples of how the understanding of links between climate change and health has been advancing in recent years, leading to various initiatives aimed at building awareness and resilience to climate change. For example, IH staff has been working to raise awareness and action in cooperation with local government partners, of the importance of protecting agricultural land for current and future production, as food supply is vulnerable to a changing climate.

Climate Change and Global Health

While climate change is often thought of as an environmental issue, evidence shows that climate change threatens the health of people here in BC and around the world. The World

Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed the threat. "The evidence is overwhelming. Climate change endangers human health," said Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General, WHO.

In 2014, former Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall, publicly commented on the need to adapt to climate impacts such as the increase in extreme weather events, and likelihood of changes to vector-borne disease patterns that will affect the health of British Columbians.

Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Public Health Officer for Nova Scotia also publicly stated the urgency of the issue, "This is probably the biggest societal issue we should be having a conversation around...There's been lots of focus on environmental sustainability; I'm not sure we're having the robust dialogue around what the health implications are today and in the future."

Climate Change and Health Policy Group

Health implications are being addressed locally through the [Climate Change and Health Policy Group \(CCHPG\)](#). The cross-sectoral initiative chaired by Tim Takaro of Simon Fraser University advances awareness and action on health and climate change. Members include leadership from federal, provincial and local government, health sector staff, academia and non-profit organizations. This kind of dialogue on health implications of climate change is translating into action in BC communities.

More Information

To find out more about addressing the health impacts of climate change in your community contact Erica Crawford: erica@bchealthycommunities.ca.

Resources

Berry, P., Clarke, K., Fleury, M.D. and Parker, S. (2014): Human Health; *in* Canada in a Changing Climate: Sector Perspectives on Impacts and Adaptation, (ed.) F.J. Warren and D.S. Lemmen; Government of Canada, Ottawa, ON, p. 191-232. Available at: <http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/environment/resources/publications/impacts-adaptation/reports/assessments/2014/16309>

Barter, S. and K. Klein (2013) "Health Authority Perceptions and Capacity for Action: Health Impacts of Climate Change in BC." BC Healthy Communities Society. Available at: <http://bchealthycommunities.ca/res/download.php?id=1698>

[Photo by Shaun Kennedy](#)