



Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians

A collection of texts in response to

*Acting on Climate Change:
Solutions from Canadian Scholars*,

a consensus document released in March 2015



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Perspective From Youth & Health

Our children and youth motivate and drive many of our actions. We want their lives to be better than our own. We want them to do the things we could not ourselves do. We want them to be healthier; we want them to have better education; we want them to be happier, cleaner, more connected, more fulfilled. The desire to make our successors' lives better and easier than ours is deeply ingrained in our culture.

However, the desire to promote and cherish our environment has not held the same clout. For many, there are more tangible assets that are sought, such as financial and physical safety, at the expense of preserving the environment. The *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* report outlines 10 key policy orientations that broadly encompass short- and long-term recommendations that can be employed to promote climate change mitigation. Much like many chronic healthcare conditions, climate change and the strategies outlined in the report may feel intangible and not applicable to us. Just as a sedentary lifestyle now seems distant and unrelated to a cardiac arrest decades later, many of the policies outlined have effects that may not be felt by individual citizens or communities, leading

to a lack of uptake and support for the proposed actions. One way to address this challenge is by addressing direct impacts of climate change and the proposed policies on individual and community health. To further this understanding, a strong partnership with healthcare agencies and professionals and youth, respectively, may strengthen the application and uptake of the proposed policy orientations.

Address the Impact of Policies on Individual and Community Health

There is growing recognition and concern about the impact of our environment on our health, and particularly on that of our children. From the air we breathe to the water we drink, our concern for our planet is heightened when tied to our personal wellbeing. The proposed policy orientations in the *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* report focus on community-specific needs, which should be commended. To strengthen their position, it may be worthwhile to include the impact of these policies on the wellbeing of all individuals and communities. For example, the report highlights housing as a major determinant of Canada's carbon emissions, and discusses the importance

of improving infrastructure to improve energy efficiency among other targets. The World Health Organization has outlined the deleterious relationship between poor housing, physical health and climate change, estimating "that nearly two million people in developing countries die from indoor air pollution caused by the burning of biomass and coal in leaky and inefficient household stoves"¹. It is also important to recognize that some proposed policies may not benefit all communities equally. For example, while transforming urban areas into walkable, mixed use and high-density cities may promote cardiovascular health, revitalization may lead to displacement of more vulnerable families, leading to further isolation². In another example, active transportation necessitates safe cities and communities, which, without other policy and community rebuilding, is not possible for many vulnerable communities where safety is a concern. Therefore, in discussing potential strategies to reduce climate change, it is imperative that policy-makers relate solutions to improved health and wellbeing to engage communities in climate mitigation.

Engage Health Care Agencies and Professionals in Policy

In the discussion on sustainability, many sectors such as finance and agriculture were mentioned in the *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* report as foundational to sustained change. I would like to suggest that an often-neglected but interested stakeholder is the healthcare industry. As outlined above, in seeking to implicate health improvement through the proposed policies, engaging healthcare professionals as advocates and stakeholders

would be instrumental in promoting public buy-in. Additionally, healthcare facilities are not insignificant producers of carbon emissions³. Hospitals are some of the most energy consuming buildings in Canada, and there have been successful interventions to reduce their carbon emissions⁴. By including motivated healthcare professionals in the dialogue on climate change mitigation, I believe it will also promote an attitude shift within the field. The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE)⁵ may be an interested stakeholder in taking action against climate change by helping change a culture within healthcare and by advocating for more effective, environmentally-sustainable treatments and processes within health care: a healthy patient requires a healthy environment.

Engage Youth in Policy Creation and Deliverables

Finally, the *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* report begins with youth as the motivation and driving force of acting on climate change. However, within the outlined policies, where are the youth as engines, motivators and collaborators in climate mitigation? In order to change the future, we must harness the energy and values that young people espouse, and identify clear ways in which policies are both youth-informed and youth-targeted. Policy-makers should strive to include the perspectives of youth in the community and those engaged in advocacy through specific, inclusive consultations with the goal to listen and implement their recommendations. Additionally, involving young people in action plans and policy is

1 http://www.who.int/hia/house_report.pdf?ua=1

2 http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/05/05/how_revitalization_is_leading_to_displacement_in_regent_park.html

3 <http://www.eia.gov/consumption/commercial/reports/2007/large-hospital.cfm>

4 <http://www.ec.gc.ca/ecoaction/default.asp?lang=En&n=F-4BE13C2-1>

5 <http://cape.ca>

essential: they are malleable, creative and tomorrow's future leaders. To engage them in protecting our future, we must not just work for them, but with them through providing opportunities for youth to be part of the research, policy and implementation process. The Youth Advisory Group (YAG) for the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, Students on Ice and Man and Biosphere Reserves are

just some examples of effective and diverse ways to include youth in meaningful roles. Through their inclusion in strategic planning, excursions and advocacy, youth gain valuable skillsets, perspectives and attitudes that will further permit them to continue to partake in climate change mitigation.



ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

SUSTAINABLE CANADA DIALOGUES

This contribution is part of a collection of texts, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*, stemming from interactions between Sustainable Canada Dialogues, an initiative of the UNESCO-McGill Chair for Dialogues on Sustainability, and business associations, First Nations, non-governmental organizations, labour groups, institutions, organizations and private citizens.

Sustainable Canada Dialogues is a voluntary initiative that mobilizes over 60 researchers from every province in Canada, representing disciplines across engineering, sciences and social sciences. We are motivated by a shared view that putting options on the table will stimulate action and is long overdue in Canada.

Together, the contributions enrich the scope of possible solutions and show that Canada is brimming with ideas, possibilities and the will to act. The views expressed in *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* are those of the contributors, and are not necessarily endorsed by Sustainable Canada Dialogues.

We thank all contributors for engaging in this dialogue with us to help reach a collective vision of desired pathways to our futures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/acting-on-climate-change