

## **Recommendations from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment for Amendments to Bill C-12, the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act**

The World Health Organization calls climate change the greatest global health threat of the 21st century<sup>1</sup>, and at the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) our members are already seeing the impacts of climate change on the health of people in Canada. It is crucial that Canada pass strong climate accountability legislation.

### **Summary Recommendations**

Bill C-12 has some of the key components that have enabled climate accountability legislation to be successful internationally. However, without the following amendments this legislation will not succeed in holding governments accountable to ambitious emissions targets:

1. A 2025 emissions target;
2. An independent body of scientific experts with their own secretariat and climate modelling ability reporting to Parliament, not to the Minister of the Environment; and,
3. Explicit alignment with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

### **Climate change is the greatest health challenge of the 21st century.**

Climate change is worsening asthma and evacuations from wildfires, increasing deaths from heat waves, making allergy seasons longer and more severe, posing challenges to food security, hastening the spread of Lyme Disease, and raising the potential for new pandemics. Impacts are being felt first and worst in Canada's far North, and by women, children, racialized individuals, and Indigenous peoples<sup>2,3</sup>. A recent study out of Harvard University estimated that 18% of premature deaths globally are due to fossil-fuel related air pollution<sup>4</sup>, and Health Canada recently reported that 15,300 people in Canada died in 2016 of air pollution<sup>5</sup>. Canada will

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<sup>1</sup>World Health Organization (WHO), "WHO calls for urgent action to protect health from climate change," in *Climate change and human health*, World Health Organization (WHO), accessed May 14, 2021, <https://www.who.int/globalchange/global-campaign/cop21/en/>.

<sup>2</sup>Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA). "Position Statement: Climate Change and Human Health," *Canadian Public Health Association*. (2019), <https://www.cpha.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/policy/positionstatements/climatechange-positionstatement-e.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Balgis Osman-Elasha, "Women...In The Shadow of Climate Change," in *UN Chronicle*, United Nations, accessed May 14, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change>.

<sup>4</sup>Karn Vohra, Alina Vodonos, Joel Schwartz, Eloise A. Marais, Melissa P. Sulprizio, Loretta J. Mickley, "Global mortality from outdoor fine particle pollution generated by fossil fuel combustion: Results from GEOS-Chem," *Environmental Research*, Volume 195 (2021) doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2021.110754, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0013935121000487#>.

<sup>5</sup>Health Canada, "Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Canada: Estimates of morbidity and premature mortality outcomes – 2021 Report," *Health Canada/Public Health Agency of Canada*, (2021) Cat.: H144-51/2021E-PDF, ISBN: 978-0-660-37331-7, Pub.: 200423, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/2021-health-effects-indoor-air-pollution.htm>

continue to warm to mid-century regardless of current emissions, and if the world continues along its current high-emissions pathway impacts on health and health systems are expected to be catastrophic by the time today's infants are in their sixties<sup>6</sup>. Disruptions to infrastructure, supply chains, and staffing pose risks to the stability of healthcare systems themselves<sup>7</sup>.

**Because of this, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change is viewed as the world's most important health treaty<sup>8</sup>.**

Accountability legislation has proven successful elsewhere in the world in enabling countries to achieve a healthy response to climate change. To use a best-practices example from the health sphere, in the United Kingdom binding carbon budgets established in their 2008 Climate Change Act spurred world-leading improvements in health sector efficiency: emissions from the National Health Service decreased by 18.5% between 2007 and 2017, while clinical activity levels increased<sup>9</sup>.

In 2020, the Climate Change Committee, the independent scientific advisory body that reports to Parliament, convened the UK Health Expert Advisory Group to advise on developing an approach to assessing the health impacts of setting the Sixth Carbon Budget. This group has produced a report looking at ways in which present-day health and equity can be optimized through measures that also reduce greenhouse gas emissions, looking in detail at the health co-benefits of such items as a just energy transition that saves lives from air pollution, a transport system that promotes chronic disease-reducing active travel, and a sustainable, resilient and healthy food system<sup>10</sup>.

**Flattening the greenhouse gas emissions curve must be viewed as being as critical to a healthy population as is bending the curve on COVID-19 infections.**

Canada has failed to meet every international climate target set and we are the only G7 country whose emissions have risen since the Paris Agreement came into force in 2016. This is not representative of the ethic of shared care for wellbeing that we have put into action during the COVID-19 pandemic. Children have stayed home from school and activities for much of the past year to protect adults who are comparatively more impacted by COVID-19. It is time to say

<sup>6</sup> Courtney Howard, Chris Buse, Caren Rose, Andrea MacNeill, and Margot Parkes. "The 2019 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Policy brief for Canada," Canadian Medical Association, (2019), <https://www.cma.ca/2019-lancet-countdown-health-and-climate-change-policy-brief-canada>.

<sup>7</sup> Courtney Howard, Chris Buse, Caren Rose, Andrea MacNeill, and Margot Parkes. "The 2019 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Policy brief for Canada," Canadian Medical Association, (2019), <https://www.cma.ca/2019-lancet-countdown-health-and-climate-change-policy-brief-canada>.

<sup>8</sup> "The Paris Agreement Is a Health Agreement - WHO," unfccc.int (United Nations - Climate Change, May 3, 2018), <https://unfccc.int/news/the-paris-agreement-is-a-health-agreement-who>.

<sup>9</sup> Sustainable Development Unit, "Reducing the use of natural resources in health and social care: 2018 report," [https://networks.sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/20180912\\_Health\\_and\\_Social\\_Care\\_NRF\\_web.pdf](https://networks.sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/20180912_Health_and_Social_Care_NRF_web.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Alice Munro, Tammy Boyce, Michael Marmot. "Sustainable Health Equity: Achieving a Net-Zero UK," Institute of Health Equity (October 2020) <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/ucl-sustainable-health-equity-achieving-a-net-zero-uk/>.

thank you to them by meeting and exceeding Canada's climate goals in order to protect child health.

**It is well-known that what gets measured, gets managed.**

Bill C-12 has some of the key components that have enabled climate accountability legislation to be successful internationally:

1. Establishing a climate accountability framework;
2. Requiring national climate targets; and,
3. Creation of an emissions reduction plan and reports on progress.

However, we are missing the opportunity to bring key components of other successful efforts into our Made-in-Canada approach to climate accountability. Without these components, this legislation will not succeed in holding governments accountable to emissions targets for decades to come.

Three aspects essential for accountability and ambition are:

1. A 2025 emissions target;
2. An independent body of scientific experts with their own secretariat and climate modelling ability reporting to Parliament, not to the Minister of the Environment; and,
3. Explicit alignment with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

**Recommendation 1: A 2025 target**

Bill C-12 needs to be amended to align with our Nationally Determined Commitments to the Paris agreement. Our 2025 reporting requirement under Paris is not a substitute for including 2025 as the first year within this accountability legislation. Addressing climate change has been systematically delayed for decades and a 2025 target and reporting requirement provides us with appropriate urgency to make the changes today that are necessary to substantially reduce emissions by 2030. Without a 2025 target, we are less likely to make the investments now that will enable us reach our 2030 target and targets into the future<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup>Carl Meyer, "Chair of France's climate council says Canada needs a stronger 2025 target, stronger net-zero advisory body," National Observer (March 3, 2021). <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/03/03/news/chair-frances-climate-council-says-canada-needs-2025-target-stronger-net>.

## **Recommendation 2: Independent Advisory Committee of Experts**

The current Advisory Body proposed by Bill C-12 lacks the mandate, structure, and budget needed to enable it to effectively hold the government to account - necessary for any accountability efforts. The Advisory Body needs to be comprised of scientific experts including health experts, with their own secretariat and climate modelling ability; and must report to Parliament, not to the Minister of the Environment, to ensure independence. The Body must be able to publicly applaud or critique government approaches without concern of reprisal. The Body also requires a substantial budget in order to have the analytical capacity necessary to determine whether Canada's climate policy will achieve stated goals. Finally, the Body must be able to produce its own reports that both assess climate policy and assess climate risk in order to enable planning for needed adaptation.

The current Net-Zero Advisory Body is comprised of experts from diverse fields, including some with the scientific and policy expertise to serve on the type of independent body that is necessary; however, the current Body does not have the structure, resources, mandate, or independence needed to achieve accountability.

## **Recommendation 3: Explicit alignment with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**

Climate accountability legislation must align explicitly with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Indigenous knowledge is expertise. The health of Indigenous peoples is deeply impacted by a changing climate, which changes the relationship of people to land<sup>12</sup>, and will also be impacted by the needed energy transition<sup>13,14</sup>. Any assessment of climate accountability must align with Indigenous peoples' rights and the regional diversity of Indigenous perspectives.

The work we undertake at CAPE is rooted in research, ethics, and sound science. As a physician organization, this approach is foundational to our work as health care professionals and informs our approach to the change needed to address the climate crisis.

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Indigenous Peoples, "Climate Change," Accessed May 14, 2021 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Dave Lovekin, "Unlocking clean energy opportunities for Indigenous communities," Pembina Institute (Feb 24, 2017), <https://www.pembina.org/blog/unlocking-clean-energy-opportunities-indigenous-communities>.

<sup>14</sup> Rhett A. Butler, "Melina Laboucan-Massimo: Catalyzing an Indigenous-led just energy transition," Mongabay: News and Inspiration from Nature's Frontline (March 27, 2021) <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/03/catalyzing-an-indigenous-led-just-energy-transition-qa-with-melina-laboucan-massimo/>.