

## Attachment #2

*Climate Change and Intersectionality:  
Summary of Assembly Discussions,  
September 2024*

## Climate Change and Intersectionality - Summary of Assembly Discussions

September 2024

In May 2024, the New Westminster Community Advisory Assembly members brainstormed a list of topics that could be addressed by the group in future months. Amongst these, the topic of climate action was a clear priority for the group (receiving votes in support from 61% of members in attendance). In particular, the theme of “climate change and intersectionality” stood out as important. “Intersectionality” describes how a person’s experiences are affected by many aspects of their identity at once, including their gender, race, income level, age or disability. Depending on the social and physical environment in which someone lives, they may be more or less affected by climate change based on their identities.

To explore this topic further, in June 2024 the Assembly met to discuss how diverse groups in New Westminster experience climate change and climate action differently based on their intersecting identity. Staff from the City’s Climate Action team, Leya Behra and Laura Sampliner, attended the meeting as active listeners.

In preparation for the meeting, Assembly members were invited to review the Climate Equity Framework prepared by UBC Sustainability Scholar Lekha Tlhotlhemaje for the City of New Westminster in 2021. The framework proposes a set of “climate equity outcome indicators.” These outcome indicators can help the City measure where climate change is impacting some groups in the community more than others and create climate policies or programs to support groups that are experiencing more difficulties. The report recommended that the City conduct public engagement to further explore and understand diverse personal experiences of climate change.

At the June meeting, Assembly members reflected on their direct experiences of climate change in relation to their identity. The meeting focused on a series of four dialogues between members of the Assembly who shared common aspects of identity. These included dialogues between youth members, Indigenous and racialized members, elder members, and members with experience of disability, neuro-divergence and/or mental health. Members who identified with each of these identities were invited to sit in an inner circle of chairs and participate in a facilitated discussion, while the remaining members listened from the outside of the circle.

Each focused dialogue reflected on three questions:

- How does this group experience the impacts of climate change?
- How does this group experience the benefits of climate action?
- What climate solutions are emerging from this group?

The Assembly’s discussions identified many themes that were not reflected in the 2021 report on climate equity indicators, which further supported the report’s recommendation to conduct public engagement around climate equity.

The following sections summarize key themes from the Assembly’s discussion, organized by the four identities that members focused on during the dialogues, as well as two additional identities that emerged in the discussion as key factors that affect people’s experience of climate change and climate action (lower income and experiences of being newcomers to Canada). This report offers just a sample—not a



comprehensive list—of the intersecting identities that impact climate experiences and the challenges experienced by these groups. It was also noted that although the experiences with climate change may vary amongst groups, climate change impacts are affecting all residents. Experiences such as extreme heat, food insecurity caused by flooding and heat, contamination of water supplies with fertilizers, and more are pressing concerns that require action.

## Youth

- Climate change can have deep **emotional and psychological impacts**, including causing feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, powerlessness and uncertainty about the future. These feelings can be felt more by youth because they are more likely to experience the long-term, future impacts of current climate policies. Many older Assembly members also expressed that they have questioned whether to start a family because of the anticipated impacts of climate change on future generations.
- The availability of information about climate change through **social media and technology can increase climate anxiety** or a desire to disconnect from climate discussions. At the same time, this is a powerful tool for raising awareness of climate issues and solutions and encouraging climate action.
- Despite the availability of information, youth experience **different levels of access to credible information** about the climate crisis and climate solutions. Some youth seek out information or receive information from school and peer groups, and others experience a lack of information. **Information gaps can increase negative psychological impacts** of climate change (e.g. lack of information about climate solutions can increase hopelessness) and can also create a generational divide between youth and middle generations if youth do not have the same information about the trade-offs and barriers involved in implementing climate solutions. Similarly, encountering **misinformation can lead to a sense of distrust and disengagement** from climate discussions.
- The group described how **participation in youth environmental advocacy groups and local climate action** can support youth's sense of agency and wellbeing in relation to the climate crisis. Through these opportunities, youth can become involved in advocacy efforts for policy change, develop greater sense of care for their environment as they become familiar with their local ecosystem, have conversations about how to cope with the psychological impacts of climate change such as climate anxiety, and foster supportive community relationships.
- The group described approaches to encourage youth participation, such as offering youth **academic credits for volunteering, ensuring access to public green space and connecting youth with local environmental organizations**.
- **Access to public transit** is a priority for younger generations who may be less likely to drive.

## Lower Income Groups

- **Income intersects with various other social identities**, increasing the challenges and barriers faced by other groups. At the same time, groups facing other systemic barriers are more likely to experience lower income.
- **Income can be a significant barrier** to people's ability to take individual climate action (e.g. electric vehicles are unaffordable to many).
- Individuals experiencing insecurity around basic needs such as housing or food are also **less likely to have the time and capacity to engage** in climate discussion and action.

- Climate change is a factor in the increasing cost of food, leading to more food insecurity or less nutritious diets for low-income households.
- Lower income groups are more likely to live in **housing that is inadequate for climate crises** (e.g. lacking air conditioning or balconies in heat waves) and/or **housing that lacks the appropriate physical infrastructure for climate action** (e.g. lack of recycling options, charging stations for electric vehicles, etc.).
- **Tenants face barriers to accessing some programs** that are designed to support lower-income groups reduce the impacts of climate change (e.g. tenants require permission from their landlords to access BC Hydro’s free air conditioning program). Tenants may also **fear speaking out about climate inequities they experience** due to their housing insecurity (e.g. not alerting about issues with drinking water in their housing).
- **People experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable** to extreme weather. Social stigma and discrimination can be barriers to them accessing support services.
- **Financial incentives and accessible services** can help people with lower incomes engage in climate action (e.g. financial incentives and close access to recycling depots, access to bike lanes and public transportation, financial support to access air conditioning or housing retrofits, etc.).

## Indigenous and Racialized People

- Indigenous and racialized people face higher poverty rates due to systemic barriers, making them **more likely to experience the climate inequities based on income** described above.
- **Experiences of racism** can pose barriers to people safely accessing climate-related support services such as cooling centres, speaking out about climate inequities, or feeling a sense of belonging in environmental action groups. The group described the value of having diverse people represented in environmental movements, as role models for their communities.
- The impacts of climate change have far-reaching **impacts on Indigenous people’s material and cultural wellbeing**. For instance, impacts to local ecosystems or polluted water impacts their livelihoods, health, and ability to practice cultural traditions such as seasonal harvesting. Efforts toward decolonization were identified as valuable.
- Urban Indigenous people and newcomers to Canada are more likely to live far from their home communities and face **environmental and financial costs of travel** to see their families.
- The group also raised the importance of initiatives such as the “Connect and Prepare” program that encourage neighbors to work together to prepare for climate disasters.

## Newcomers to Canada

- **Newcomers to Canada can face greater barriers accessing information** about climate change, climate solutions and available supports due to language barriers, lack of awareness about existing information channels, differences in cultural norms, and increased risk of receiving misinformation. As with youth, increasing access to credible information is a priority for this group, as well as encouraging people to fact check information they receive.

- There is a **unique opportunity to introduce climate-positive habits** to newcomers when they are adjusting to their new home, through information campaigns and other activities.
- The global impacts of climate change are resulting in more people moving to new countries, which can in turn worsen **anti-immigration sentiments and racism** faced by newcomers to Canada.

## Elders

- Elders are **more physically vulnerable to climate crises such as extreme heat**, which in turn increases experiences of climate anxiety. Members cited the 2021 heat dome which led to 33 deaths in New Westminster, two-thirds of which were seniors.
- **Public infrastructure to lessen the impacts of heat**, such as green spaces, spray parks and cooling centres are high priorities for elders, as well as **programs to enhance cooling infrastructure in housing**, such as air conditioning and cooling rooms. While building codes are changing for new construction, elders are more likely to have existing homes in older buildings and face greater barriers to accessing public cooling spaces.
- Elders who earn less income in retirement are **more likely to experience climate inequities based on income** as described above. They are also **more likely to experience climate inequities related to experiences of disability** as described below.
- **Connecting across generations for climate action** opens unique opportunities to exchange knowledge (e.g. youth learning from seniors about sustainable lifestyle habits from the past) and promote a sense of hope, connection and agency.

## People with Experience of Disability, Neuro-divergence and Mental Health

- People with disabilities or facing health challenges may have **reduced mobility and access to public cooling programs**, making it more **important to have access to cooling infrastructure in their housing**. Group homes or low-barrier housing for people with disabilities or mental health needs are not always equipped for extreme heat.
- **Medications, chronic health conditions and disabilities can increase people's vulnerability to climate impacts** such as extreme heat or air pollution. Similarly, climate crises can also **affect supply chains for medications**. It was noted that members of the trans community who rely on medications are also more sensitive to heat and vulnerable to supply chain issues.
- Extreme weather and climate change can **increase existing mental health challenges**, as well as create new emotional and psychological challenges as described above.
- People with disabilities, neuro-divergence and mental health are more likely to experience poverty and **the climate inequities based on income** described above.
- **Community-led outreach programs and networks of caring neighbours** can be important to support people facing increased vulnerability to climate change due to disabilities, neuro-divergence and mental health.
- With enough supports and accommodations, **people with experiences of disability, neuro-divergence and mental health can offer unique skills and insights for the development of climate solutions**.



However, they often face a variety of barriers to mobility, communication and participation. For instance, it was mentioned that universal design doesn't incorporate considerations for neuro-divergence.