



## Our role in planetary health

On 22 April, we mark Earth Day. For those of us living in British Columbia—a province defined by forests, rivers, mountains, and coastline—it is increasingly difficult to ignore the changes unfolding around us. Shifting weather patterns, more frequent extreme events, and disrupted seasons are no longer abstract projections; they are lived realities. Climate change is not something we are preparing for in the future. It is something we are responding to now.

My interest in climate health began in the early 2000s, shortly after I became a father. Like many parents, I began thinking differently about the future—not only in terms of opportunity, but also in terms of responsibility. We hope to leave our children something meaningful, and that inheritance must include a stable, habitable world where they can thrive.

Over time, I've tried to align my actions with those values. While working in the UK, I led changes that reduced our clinic's energy use and operating costs. Today, both of our family vehicles are electric. Whenever possible, I drive to Vancouver rather than flying. Over a year of board meetings, that choice reduced my carbon footprint by the equivalent of driving a gasoline vehicle more than 10 000 km. It also brought unexpected benefits: a calmer journey and time to reflect or work. These are modest steps, but they reinforce an important truth: many climate solutions also improve quality of life.

Unfortunately, as my interest deepened, I watched climate change become increasingly politicized. That is profoundly frustrating. Climate change should not be a

political issue—just as vaccines should not be. The science is clear. The health impacts are well established. And many solutions are already available.

Climate change does not exist in isolation. Biodiversity loss is now recognized as a national security risk. Recent assessments have highlighted how climate change and ecological degradation—including threats

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to boreal forests in countries like Canada—can contribute to food insecurity, water shortages, pandemics, economic instability, forced migration, and conflict. These pressures deepen polarization and destabilize systems globally.

We are already living the consequences. Wildfires have forced evacuations of long-term care facilities and hospitals. Flooding has closed emergency departments. The 2021 heat dome contributed to the deaths of 619 British Columbians, many of them elderly or vulnerable. Climate change is altering disease patterns, worsening respiratory illness, exacerbating chronic conditions, and placing new strain on already stretched systems.

Health care itself is also a significant contributor to carbon emissions. At the same time, it is recognized as a pillar of national security—now explicitly linked to climate stability. Climate change affects supply chains, infrastructure, workforce resilience, and system readiness. Suggesting it falls outside our mandate is no longer tenable.

So, what are we doing at Doctors of BC? In 2021, our Council on Health Promotion (COHP) developed a policy statement on climate change and human health.<sup>1</sup> That was an important step, and aspects will continue to be updated as new supports and evidence emerge. Through COHP, we also encourage broader systemic change toward a health care system that is environmentally responsible and resilient.

Doctors of BC is also actively promoting sustainability by making it a core principle of our strategic plan and embedding environmental responsibility across all aspects of our work. We support physicians in adopting more sustainable practices; reduce demand for health services through chronic disease management; and reduce emissions where possible by sharing resources, tool kits, and educational opportunities for physicians. You can learn more about this work and access guides, tool kits, and webinars on our sustainability web page.<sup>2</sup>

The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada has also developed the *Roadmap for Planetary Health and Sustainable Health Systems for Canadian Medical Professionals*, which aims to map out where we stand today, identify effective interventions, and enhance collaboration across all

## PRESIDENT'S COMMENT

levels of medical education and health care delivery.<sup>3</sup>

But it's important that we keep building upon these initiatives. Through our strong relationship with government, I will do all I can to ensure that physician leaders are meaningfully engaged with and included in climate initiatives. I will also continue ongoing conversations with provincial and territorial medical associations and the Canadian Medical Association, supporting collaboration and shared responsibility for a challenge that transcends regions.

Climate change is not a future problem. It is a present reality—one that sits squarely within our responsibility as health care leaders and advocates. I hope you will join me in acting with urgency and purpose. ■

—Adam Thompson, MD  
Doctors of BC President

### References

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3. Howard C, Marks R. Roadmap for planetary health and sustainable health systems for Canadian medical professionals. Version 2. Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada. 8 November 2024. Accessed 13 February 2026. [www.afmc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/AFMC-Roadmap-on-Planetary-Health-EN-Reformatted.pdf](http://www.afmc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/AFMC-Roadmap-on-Planetary-Health-EN-Reformatted.pdf).

### Additional reading

His Majesty's Government. Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security: A national security assessment. Updated 2 February 2026. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/696e0eae719d837d69afc7de/National\\_security\\_assessment\\_-\\_global\\_biodiversity\\_loss\\_\\_ecosystem\\_collapse\\_and\\_national\\_security.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/696e0eae719d837d69afc7de/National_security_assessment_-_global_biodiversity_loss__ecosystem_collapse_and_national_security.pdf).

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