

EcoLens: Capturing climate change through community storytelling in BC

Increasingly, climate change is shaping the health and well-being of British Columbians in visible and personal ways. Public health surveillance systems track health impacts from environmental hazards such as extreme heat and wildfire smoke, but they cannot fully reflect the lived realities of people navigating these events. To address this gap, the BC Centre for Disease Control created EcoLens (<https://ecolens.ca>), an online storytelling platform where people can upload and explore climate stories through an interactive map or themed collections.

This article is the opinion of the BC Centre for Disease Control and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.

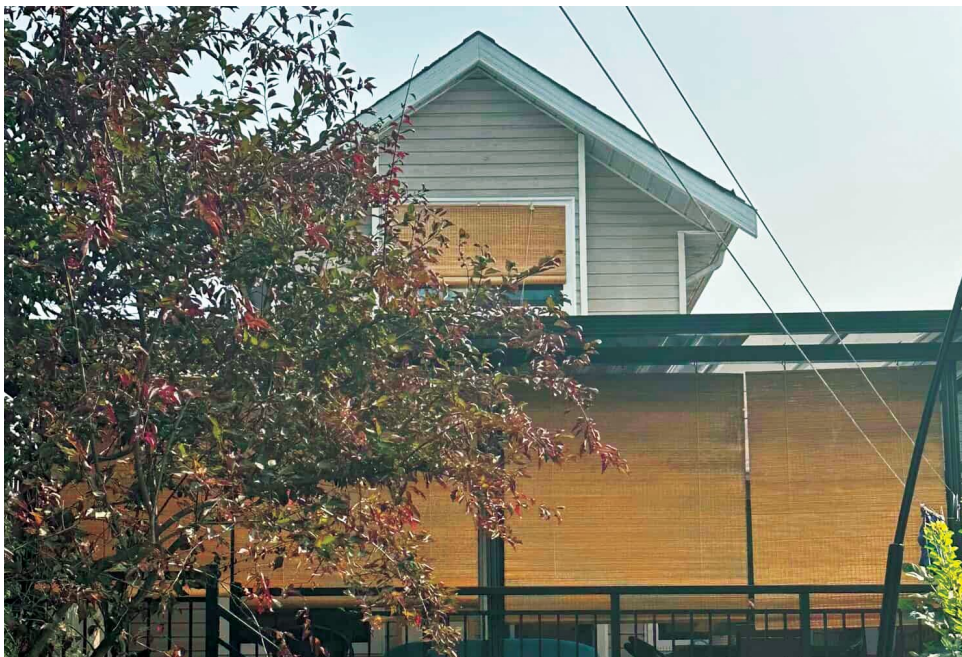
EcoLens is a provincial initiative that invites people to share photos and short reflections about how climate change is affecting their lives and their health [Figure]. The platform brings community-generated place-based knowledge into the broader conversation about climate change impacts and resilience. This approach builds on existing qualitative and participatory research methods, including photovoice, which uses images and narrative to support reflection and learning.¹

Why stories matter for climate change and health

The impacts of climate change are not distributed equally throughout BC. For example, rural and remote areas, Indigenous communities, people experiencing

homelessness, and isolated seniors often face greater risks.² Communities also differ in how they respond to the impacts, and the differences are not always captured in administrative data. EcoLens brings deeper dimensions of susceptibility and resilience to light through lived experiences, offering insight that can help health professionals better understand and respond to local needs.

Climate anxiety is increasingly recognized as a mental health issue in Canada.³ Research shows that climate anxiety often stems from feeling alone, powerless, or overwhelmed by abstract global threats.⁴ EcoLens provides a space where people can document local impacts and personal actions, humanizing climate change as a shared social experience rather than



ADAPTING TO THE HEAT:

“ I find myself getting anxious about the impacts of climate change, but doing something to adapt or mitigate helps me feel better. Especially something for our community, like keeping young trees watered on the boulevard, or checking in on neighbours when it’s hot.”

FIGURE. An example photo and story shared on EcoLens (<https://ecolens.ca>), demonstrating how one household has adapted to extreme heat with increased window shading.

something distant or abstract. Storytelling helps people process emotions, build collective efficacy, and regain a sense of control in the face of uncertainty.

Turning collective experience into collective evidence

As the story collection grows, we hope that EcoLens will support public health practice in several ways. Thematic insights may improve climate adaptation planning and community engagement strategies. Emerging observations can generate new research questions and catalyze future research initiatives. Lessons learned from the platform may also inform knowledge translation products and educational materials tailored to diverse audiences. Over time, EcoLens can help support more responsive and equitable decision making.

EcoLens is ultimately about connection—connecting health professionals with lived experiences, connecting communities with one another, and connecting individual

stories to broader patterns of resilience. In a time of rising climate anxiety, EcoLens offers a space for learning, reflection, and solidarity.

Call to action

As EcoLens grows, physicians have an important role to play in strengthening its reach and impact. Clinicians are often the first to hear about how climate-related events affect their patients' health and safety. By sharing the platform, physicians can help ensure that the stories collected reflect the geographic and cultural diversity of the province.

To get involved or to learn how EcoLens can support your work, contact us at ecolens@bccdc.ca. ■

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