

# Crippling Climate Adaptation

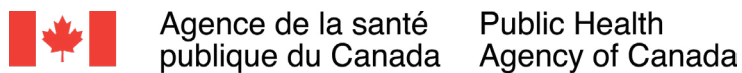
## *Disability Justice and Climate Change*



Crippling Climate Adaptation  
A Special Report on Disability Justice and Climate Change  
©2025 Prairie Climate Centre  
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Funding for this project has been made possible through contributions from:



The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Suggested citation:

Prairie Climate Centre. (2025) *Crippling Climate Adaptation, Disability Justice and Climate Change*. <https://climateatlas.ca/>

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## ***Purpose of this Document***

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This report by the Prairie Climate Centre (PCC) conveys **the perspectives on Disability Justice at the intersection of climate change**, as expressed by participants at the event: Crippling Climate Adaptation.

This event at the University of Winnipeg consisted of a screening of the film Crippling Climate Adaptation, followed by a panel and group discussion. The outcome of the event was the development of valuable partnerships and a collaborative process to explore health equity from an array of perspectives and interests.

While this report reflects the participants' input at a specific moment in time, the conversation on understanding disability is evolving, and we acknowledge there are perspectives that were not captured at this event and therefore not reflected in this report.

**Disability is part of being human. Almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life.**

*Source: WHO, 2022 [1]*



**In 2022, 8 million Canadians aged 15 and over (or 27% of population), had at least one disability.**

*Source: Statistics Canada, 2022 [2]*

## Language / Concepts / Terms

### Language Use

#### **Disabled Person** *Identity-first language use*

Places disability identity first, it is preferred by those who view their disability as an important part of their identity.

From the **social model of disability**, disability is an aspect of someone's identity, it implies that disability is socially constructed, and it is caused by the design and the structure of societies [3].

#### **Person with a disability** *People-first language use*

Places emphasis on the person as an individual first and less emphasis on their disability [3].

*Note: "Disabled Person" and "Person with a Disability" were used interchangeably in this report to respect individual preference from participants.*

### Concepts / Terms

**Equity** is a principle and process that promotes fair conditions for all persons to fully participate in society [4].

**Ability expectation** is about valuing certain abilities [5] considered as normal and necessary to function in societies. Ability expectations have many parts, they include the skills that you expect of yourself, and that others expect of you [6].

**Ableism** is the discrimination towards someone based on their so-called abilities, often favoring those who do not have a disability and seeing less value in those that do. Ableism can be reflected in actions, words, behaviors, and access issues [7].

**Systemic Ableism** includes the physical barriers, policies, laws, regulations, and practices that exclude people with disabilities from full participation and equal opportunity [8].

**Disability Justice** is a framework that understands that all bodies are unique and essential, that all persons have strengths and needs that must be met [9]. As a framework it provides a way to think about and organize around disability, highlighting the ways that ableism is linked to multiple other systems of oppression [10, 11]. Emphasizing the needs and perspectives of disabled peoples with different lived experiences.

**Intersectionality** is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression [12].

**Climate Change Adaptation** is any activity that reduces the negative impacts of climate change or helps people cope with them, or an activity that takes advantage of new opportunities that result from climate change [13].

## ***Why is the intersection of disability justice and climate change relevant?***

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Recent climate events in Canada, like heat waves, wildfires, and flooding, have highlighted the effect of climate change on people's lives. Although climate change is affecting all, certain groups are more vulnerable to its impacts.

Because of multiple intersecting factors, **people with disabilities** are more vulnerable to the health effects of climate change and could be disproportionately impacted during extreme weather events [14, 15, 16].

Inequalities exacerbated by climate change could be addressed and prevented, by ensuring a full and effective participation of disabled persons in climate action at all levels [16].

Climate Justice, according to the World Health Organization, puts **equity** and human rights at the core of decision-making and action on climate change [17]. To achieve this, we need to challenge **systemic ableism and ability expectations**.

In Canada, though many existing climate change policies identify groups made vulnerable by climate change, rarely do these policies acknowledge the specific vulnerability that they face, or provide concrete action on how to support **disabled persons** [18].

Based on lived experiences, having to face challenging environments, **disabled persons** have developed unique knowledges and resources for adapting.

Integrating **Disability Justice** in **climate change adaptation** acknowledges the importance of **intersectionality** in addition to the diverse regional and local impacts of climate change.

This is key in transforming societies and making them more accessible and equitable [19].

*\*Bolded terms are defined in page 6*

# **Crippling Climate Adaptation Disability Justice and Climate Change Event Summary**

*...cripping something means applying a disability justice lens to it.*



On November 17, 2023, the Prairie Climate Centre, in collaboration with the University of Winnipeg Research Office, hosted the event “Crippling Climate Adaptation: Disability Justice and Climate Change”, to address the gap in research and practice within Canada, the event was a unique and timely opportunity to bring together diverse voices to explore the current perspectives on the intersection of Disability Justice and climate change.

The event engaged the participation of disability community members, activists, local organizations, knowledge holders, community members, academics, and representatives from nonprofit and government organizations, which through a panel discussion and facilitated conversations explored perspectives for transitioning to a Disability Justice perspective on climate change adaptation.

The event opened with a screening of the film [“Crippling Climate Adaptation: Disability Justice and Climate Change”](#) [20], which served as a framework to examine the roles and needs of disabled people in adaptation planning and its influence on policy making.



## About the Film

### Synopsis

People with disabilities are the world's largest minority group and are disproportionately affected by climate change. As disability justice and climate issues collide, *Crippling Climate Adaptation* lays bare the often-disastrous consequences of overlooking people with disabilities and illustrates the need to consider the unique needs of people with disabilities and include them in climate adaptation.

Set to a lively visual backdrop of dance, music, and activism, this documentary defines the incredible toolkit on adaptation from the disability community, one that adds depth, texture, and creativity to get beyond traditional ways of how the environment is used.

### Watch the Film

Available in CC and descriptive audio



## What were some of the events and impacts of climate change identified by event participants?

Some of the climate change events mentioned during the conversations include heatwaves, floods, and forest fires, which were identified as having a direct impact on health, services, and infrastructure.

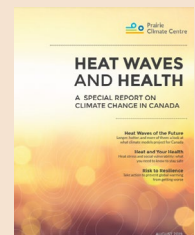
### Did you know?

In 2022, the British Columbia Coroners Service (BCCS), convened a panel to review the deaths of 619 persons who died following an extreme heat event that occurred during the summer of 2021 [21].

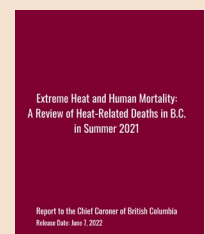
**Ensuring vulnerable populations are identified and supported during extreme heat events** was one of the identified areas to reduce heat-related deaths [21].

*From "Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in B.C. in Summer 2021" [21].*

### Explore Resources



### Access the report:



## Panel Discussion

### Climate Change Impact & Disabled People in Canada

Five experts spanning disability studies, disability rights advocacy, and policy planning from across Canada shared the perceptions, leadership roles, and rights of disabled people in adaptation planning, and their influence on climate change adaptation policymaking.

#### Meet the Panelists:

*“We are looking to understand what kind of perspectives people hold, what kind of needs people have, what kinds of tools people need, and what kinds of policies need to be in place to make these solutions happen over time. We know it is not going to happen right away, but we are hoping to create some toolkits that communities can use in their decision making.”*



**Karina Cardona**  
CAPE Canadian Association of  
Physicians for the Environment



**Dr. Sébastien Jodoin**  
McGill Associate  
Professor  
Canada Research Chair  
in Human Rights, Health  
and the Environment



**Dr. Nancy Hansen**  
Professor and Director  
of the Interdisciplinary  
Master's Program  
Disability Studies at the  
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**Allen Mankewich**  
Manitoba Labour and  
Immigration, Canadian  
Center on Disability  
Studies, Disability rights  
advocate



**Sarah Prowse**  
PHAC Policy Planning  
and Intergovernmental  
Affairs

## Leadership of disabled people on climate adaptation planning

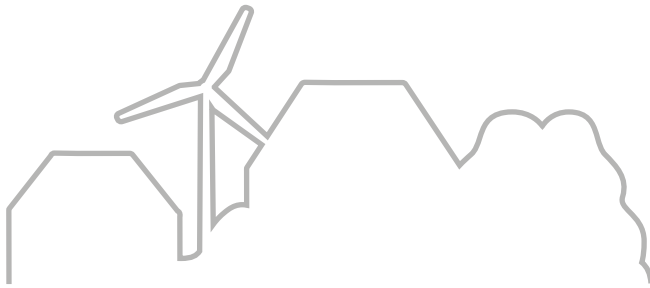
*"I think that's where we can bring sort of unique perspectives and ideas to climate change adaptation and other sort of policy issues where we're needing more of an equity focus."*

Allen Mankewich

## Building a collective understanding

*"I think we have to expect disability from the outset and not see disability as an add on or afterthought. That disability is always present, whether or not it's recognized, and that anything that's done around climate change has to include a disability lens."*

Dr. Nancy Hansen



## Social perception of disability and its influence on policy development

*"Recognizing that there are structural reasons why disability is not very visible, it's stigmatized...I don't meet people who are intentionally ableist. They don't know what they don't know."*

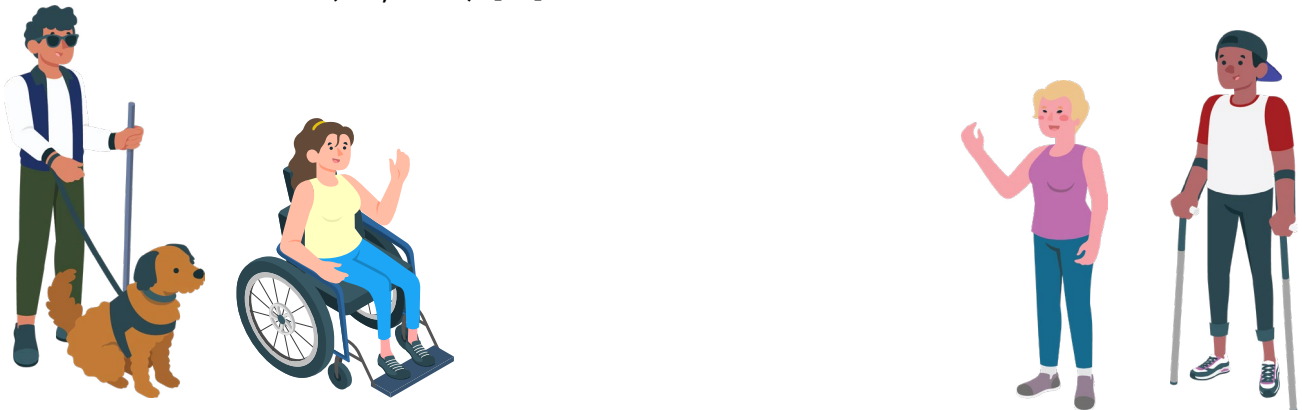
Dr. Sébastien Jodoin

*"If one person is left behind, we're all left behind. You know, how do we get to this shift that it is all about all of us and not one or the other."*

Sarah Prowse

# “Nothing About Us Without Us”

This motto centers around the principle of participation and has been used as part of global movements in its effort to achieve full participation and equalization of opportunities for, by, and with persons with disabilities, being an example of how the principle of full participation contributes to the development of inclusive societies (UN, 2004). [19]



## **Guided Conversations**

Through guided conversations, event participants collectively examined the roles, risks, obligations, and opportunities associated with disability and climate change adaptation.

Capturing some of the participants' contributions, the following section presents an overview of the ideas shared and the challenges identified.

*People need to be empathetic, but most people don't understand what it is like to be disabled.*

*Preparedness for climate change needs to reflect the level that we will be impacted by it.*

*How do we get people to the table? Everyone fits somewhere but finding that is hard.*

*We need to plan as if everyone is disabled, because everyone has the possibility to be disabled.*

*We need to explore the possible unintended consequences of addressing a climate risk and how it could result in maladaptation.*

*\* Insights from conversation notes*

## Topics Explored

### Conversation Insights

Systemic ideas around capacities, rights and lived experience, get in the way of fighting climate change.

We need to meet people where they are at, to understand the levels of what people experience, and attend to those who might require more assistance in any climate emergency situation.



## RISKS

*What are the disproportionate risks faced by disabled Canadians in the climate crisis, including those who face multiple and intersecting barriers and forms of discrimination?*

- **Lack of empathy**
- **An individualistic approach**
- **Not addressing systemic issues related to capacities, rights and lived experiences**

Can lead to inadequate approaches to solutions.

There is a need to explore the possible unintended consequences of addressing a climate risk and how it could result in maladaptation.

## OBLIGATIONS

*How are we ensuring that adaptation efforts enhance climate resilience with disabled people?*

- **Ensure representation**  
Diverse representation is required when developing planning processes and adaptation policies.
- **Inclusive mechanisms and processes**  
Build the necessary networks to ensure that processes are inclusive, highlighting the importance of community outreach.
- **Communication and transparency**  
The importance of being transparent about processes and communicating future actions.

When developing climate adaptation strategies, different ways of knowing and doing must be included. People with disabilities already have different ways of knowing and operating in their environments, such as “life hacks” and worldviews about coexistence and stewardship of the environment.

At the core we need a collective identity, so we are taking care of everyone: elderly people, children, and adults.



\* Insights from conversation notes

## ROLES

*What are the roles that disabled people, their leadership, and their knowledge can play in efforts to enhance climate resilience in Canada?*

- **Disability creativity and innovation**  
Different ways of knowing and doing should be included when developing climate adaptation strategies.
- **Disability voice and importance**  
There is an existing desire for more people to have a voice in the conversation and take action on roles and responsibilities in addressing climate change.
- **Support community**  
People who assist disabled people, including family members, healthcare providers and support workers among others, play a pivotal role as they possess valuable knowledge and have identified needs essential for providing assistance.

## OPPORTUNITIES

*What are the opportunities to use disability knowledge in climate resilience?*

- **Bring more voices to the discussion and integrate perspectives**  
Inclusion of disabled people to climate adaptation will open doors and will enrich climate adaptation strategies.
- **Climate change is an opportunity to rethink and envision the future we want to achieve**
- **Ensure diverse needs and perspectives are being considered in planning and policy making**

## Challenges Identified

### Conversation Takeaways

#### CHALLENGES

Challenges highlighted by participants on the transition to Disability Justice and climate change adaptation.

- **Understanding of climate change**

*Climate resilience is new to disabled people; it is new to all people.*

*Regional and geographical differences need to be taken into consideration as the effects of climate change vary place to place.*

- **Ensuring representation of people with disabilities in climate change adaptation**

*What are acceptable conditions for all of us?*

- **Shifting away from an individual perspective to understand and recognize needs**

*Individualism is what gets in the way of fighting climate change.*



*\* Insights from conversation notes*



## Each one of us has a role to play and can contribute to climate adaptation.

*“Different people, in different roles with responsibilities attached to climate adaptation, each one of us has a role to play.”*

**Karina Cardona [20]**



## **Resources to explore:**

### **Ability Expectations/ Ableism Glossary**

*Dr. Gregor Wolbring Ability Expectations / Ableism Glossary*

<https://wolbring.wordpress.com/ability-expectationableism-glossary/>

### **Disability models:**

*A way with words and images: guide for communicating with and about persons with disabilities*

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/words-images.html>

### **Disability Justice:**

Sins Invalid

<https://www.sinsinvalid.org/>

10 Principles of Disability Justice

<https://sinsinvalid.org/10-principles-of-disability-justice/>

Disability Justice: An Audit Tool

[Disability Justice: An Audit Tool \(squarespace.com\)](https://www.squarespace.com/disability-justice-audit-tool)

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*"Disability Justice is about recognizing the inherent value in all human beings. People have different ways of perceiving, different ways of thinking, whose brains work differently, whose bodies work differently. Each of us carries a thing of value that is needed by our society in order to enrich all of our lives."*

**Debbie Patterson**  
*Theatre Maker [20]*

