



What is the role of Interior Health in addressing climate change?

A health authority's main priority is to provide quality health services to the public. These services can be in hospitals and other care facilities, but they can also be in the community, and even in your home.

Climate change is causing adverse changes to the natural environment, which can negatively impact your health. Therefore it is in our best interest as a Health Authority to minimize our contribution to climate change, and attempt to mitigate the effects on your health.

As producers of large volumes of greenhouse gases (GHGs), health authorities must consider the impact their facilities could have on climate change. Interior Health's (IH) Energy and Environmental Sustainability managers work to monitor, report, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. We identify business transformation opportunities that contribute to:

- having a positive impact on processes and systems,
- reducing our impact on the environment, and
- working within economic realities of our current health care system.

For example, the PharmaFlow initiative enables physicians to digitally transmit medication orders to Interior Health pharmacies, saving a lot of paper previously used by fax machines (over 1 million sheets saved already). Other initiatives have included encouraging car-pooling in both fleet and personal vehicles, and upgrading lighting in many of our facilities. The introduction of the Sustainability Associates program allows employees to be involved locally with their own team or facility while also contributing to the overall health authority objectives. These staff promote sustainable goals and practices, and raise awareness of initiatives going on around IH to reduce our environmental footprint.

Interior Health has Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) whose goals are to minimize environmental health risks to the public through advocacy, risk assessment, health education and the application of public health law. Some of the many ways they manage potential health risks is through food safety, water safety, air quality monitoring and communicable disease control. The hazards associated with these areas of risk could increase as the climate changes.

Medical Health Officers (MHOs) are responsible for monitoring, protecting and improving the health of the population within the region. They are actively looking to understand the challenges to public health that climate change poses. The goal is to reduce vulnerability and risk, increase resiliency of individuals and communities, and encourage healthy personal behaviours. Health authorities play a key role in communicating practical and useful information to health service providers, caregivers, and the public to help manage the health risks from climate change impacts.