



## HUMAN HEALTH AND CLIMATE ACTION; WHAT ROLE FOR FOUNDATIONS?

On July 22, 2020, Philanthropic Foundations Canada presented a webinar with:

- **Dr. Pierre Gosselin**, medical advisor in health and climate at the Institut national de santé publique du Québec and at Ouranos, Clinical Professor and Associate Researcher at CHU de Québec – Université Laval and Associate Professor at Centre Eau Terre Environnement (ETE) of Institut national de la recherche scientifique;
- **Dr. Éric Notebaert**, urgentologist at CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Medicine of the Université de Montréal and member of the Association québécoise des médecins pour l'environnement; and
- **Annie Bérubé**, Program Director at the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> A cascade of extreme phenomena is summarized as a sequential series of climate events, such as a major flood, a drought and forest fires, within a very short space of time.

<sup>2</sup> A heat wave is defined as 3 or more consecutive days with temperatures over 30°C.

<sup>3</sup> Diseases that are transmitted from animals to humans.

### Climate change in Quebec

Between 1948 and 2016, temperatures increased by about 1.5°C in Quebec. Extreme phenomena directly related to climate change (droughts, flooding, heat waves, storms) were multiplied by three. Moreover, the domino effects or “cascades”<sup>1</sup> of extreme phenomena remain the heaviest issue to bear.

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*“When I started 25 years ago, climatologists told us: “Nothing major will happen before 2050”. But, 25 years later, we’re living with it already. What was supposed to happen in 2050 is starting now in 2020.” – Dr. Pierre Gosselin*

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In Quebec, within the next 50 years, the annual number of days when the temperature will exceed 30°C will be multiplied by three on the average. Moreover, the number of heat waves<sup>2</sup> will increase by a factor of 3 to 10, depending on the region.

### The impacts on individuals' health

There is no new disease related to climate change. But the existing diseases (cardiovascular and respiratory diseases) are occurring more frequently and their effects are aggravated. Certain infectious diseases that naturally occur farther south will move north, and certain zoonotic diseases<sup>3</sup> are spreading.



There is also an increase in mental health problems, particularly caused by the cascades of extreme climate phenomena. These are aggravating factors for the health of populations who have preexisting vulnerabilities, including children, seniors or people in precarious situations.

Climate change may have direct effects on human health (heat stroke, injuries and deaths related to catastrophes, etc.) and indirect effects (on water and air quality, food production, exposure to UV radiation, migrations and conflicts, etc.). It is mainly the indirect effects that are felt in Canada and that can have a major impact on the healthcare system.

**Intervention in fighting climate change can be done on 3 levels:**

Mitigation	Adaptation	Resilience
Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and their concentration in the atmosphere to limit climate warming.	Change our ways of doing things and our infrastructures to prevent the effects of climate change on our societies.	Develop our collective and individual capabilities to deal with the effects of climate change and recover after extreme events.

**Priority fields of intervention**

In Quebec, the healthcare community can contribute significantly in several priority fields of intervention:

- energy issues,
- active transportation and public transit,
- urban heat islands,
- agriculture and food,
- extreme climate events,
- and the green shift of health centres.

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*“Health and environmental non-profits need the support of philanthropic foundations.” – Dr. Éric Notebaert*

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**Examples of projects in which the foundations can participate**

In the fields of health and fighting climate change, the foundations can fund, in particular:

- studies and research on the impacts on human health of exploitation of fossil fuels,
- concrete projects that promote active transportation and public transit, which have health and environmental benefits that are still largely underrated,



- concrete green urban planning projects, such as creating parks and fighting heat islands,
- community gardens and care farming projects,
- the transition of hospitals – which represent 5% of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada – by funding projects that seek energy efficiency, use of clean energy sources, and improvement of transportation, residual materials management, food and water.

### Courses of action for health philanthropy: 3 major fields of action of the McConnell Foundation

The McConnell Foundation has emphasized mitigation of climate change. But there are also enormous needs for adaptation and resilience. Most of the investments are made in collaboration with other foundations.

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*“You have the option, if you are interested in investing in fighting climate change, of joining several collaborations that already exist in philanthropy, where the projects are evaluated jointly. Through these collaborations, your investment will have an impact that will be quadrupled in some cases.” – Annie Bérubé*

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The McConnell Foundation’s three major fields of action seek to ensure that Canada does its fair share in fighting climate change.

1. Maintain civic engagement and mobilize the population in the climate cause through effective climate communication.

Financial support for publications that have evidence-based data to inform populations is essential.

2. Support the organizations, academics, think tanks and research institutes that advocate improvement of environmental public policies to all levels of government.
3. Mobilize private capital by providing alternatives and information concerning the existing possibilities of sustainable finance.

### Conclusion

In its grantmaking practice, a foundation must think of several dimensions at the same time. Whether intervening with the social sector, with marginalized or vulnerable populations, or in the field of health, we must also address the vulnerability of populations to climate change.