

Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience Framework Topic Summaries

Connections Between Early Adversity, Resilience and CLIMATE CHANGE

The [Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience Framework](#) is a call for collective action across sectors. It aims to inspire and mobilize communities to work together to develop innovative and meaningful solutions that prevent adversity, strengthen protective factors, build resilience, and support healing in families and communities. This document will provide a summary of how early adversity and resilience connect to climate change.

Reducing early adversity and strengthening resilience is a powerful **prevention strategy**. By implementing evidence-informed interventions that build protective factors and address risk factors linked to the social determinants of health and inequity, we can act upstream to lessen both the likelihood and impact of harm and improve health and well-being. Climate change is a major source of early life adversity, directly and indirectly affecting individuals, families, and communities in both the immediate and long term. By undermining the environments that support healthy development, it exacerbates social and health inequities and amplifies risks across the life course, perpetuating patterns of disadvantage.

What is the connection between early adversity and climate change?

- Climate change places children at heightened risk for physical, cognitive, psychological and emotional harm.** Climate-related events, such as wildfires, extreme heat, and water scarcity, can directly and indirectly affect physical health, disrupt development, and threaten mental and emotional well-being, while increasing the risk of broader early-life adversities.^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Awareness of the impacts of climate change can also trigger strong emotional responses across all age groups, particularly among children and youth; however, with appropriate support, these responses can promote adaptive coping and constructive environmental action.^{7,8,9}
- Climate hazards intensify existing adversities by disrupting environments (natural and built), community and cultural systems, and the supports families rely on for health and resilience.** Climate hazards are climate-related events or conditions that can cause harm, including extreme heat, severe weather, vector-borne and zoonotic diseases, poor air quality, threats to food or water safety and security, and ultraviolet radiation. When these climate stressors intersect with poverty or other family challenges, the combined pressures can disrupt the stability needed for healthy growth and development, creating long-term health risks that reinforce disadvantage and increase susceptibility to future climate-related harms.^{10,11,12,13}
- Climate-driven disruptions to community and cultural systems can have long-term consequences.** Climate change can damage culturally significant environments and food systems, displace families, and disrupt intergenerational knowledge sharing, especially in communities closely connected to the land. These losses impact physical, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being and may reinforce cycles of inequity.^{1,12}
- Systemic inequities shape who is exposed to climate hazards, who is most vulnerable to harm, and who has access to protective and recovery resources.** Historical and structural inequities place some people at greater risk from climate hazards and limit access to supportive resources, shaping opportunities for health and resilience across the life course.¹
- Early life adversity shapes sensitivity, exposure, and adaptive capacity to climate change.** How structural and social determinants of health are experienced in early life influences vulnerability to climate hazards and the capacity of individuals, families, and communities to adapt, respond, and build resilience to climate change.^{1,14,15,16,17,18,19,20}



What actions does the Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience Framework recommend?

Integrated actions that promote healthy development and offer co-benefits, such as climate resilience, while addressing multiple priorities simultaneously, represent an ideal approach. Collaborative, multi-sector efforts that foster socially connected, equitable, and inclusive communities, support social-emotional development and mental well-being, and promote responsive, culturally safe caregiving—including parenting/caregiving readiness— can all directly reduce vulnerability to climate impacts. Activities that support adaptation help people, communities, and infrastructure adjust to climate change, even when not explicitly framed through a climate lens. Such overlaps position climate resilience as a continuation of existing early adversity and resilience efforts, rather than additional work. Together, these actions build stronger, healthier, and more resilient families and communities across the life course. While all framework activities contribute to addressing early adversity and building resilience, [the actions highlighted on the next page](#) provide evidence-informed examples of climate adaptation that align with and strengthen existing framework activities, illustrating how early adversity, resilience, and climate-health lenses can be applied in an integrated, multi-solving approach.

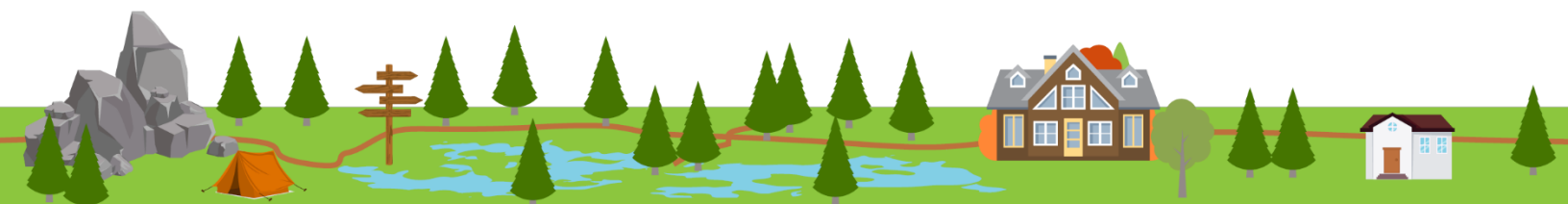
Legend: Each colour corresponds to a focus area

**SOCIALLY CONNECTED,
EQUITABLE, AND
INCLUSIVE
COMMUNITIES**

**SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AND
RESILIENCE**

**REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
AND
PARENTING/CAREGIVING
READINESS**

**RESPONSIVE AND
CULTURALLY SAFE
PARENTING/
CAREGIVING**



	CHILD/YOUTH	FAMILY	COMMUNITY	SOCIETY
Shift social norms	*Meaningfully engage children and youth in climate change education and action, recognizing them as equal partners in driving solutions ^{21,22}	*Support families in climate-safety planning by helping them understand local risks and how involving their children in preparedness activities, like assembling emergency kits, can build confidence and reduce stress during extreme weather events ^{23,24}	*Embed education on climate-related exposures (e.g., heat, air pollution, extreme weather, and other environmental hazards) as a standard component of prenatal programs and services provided to expectant parents, equipping them with awareness and practical strategies to support maternal health and optimal pregnancy and fetal outcomes ^{25,26,27}	*Position climate change as a long-term children's health and early-life adversity issue in municipal and community messaging to raise awareness and foster a sense of urgency ^{28,29}
Integrate upstream strategies	*Promote active travel education and walk/roll initiatives (e.g., Walk to School Day or Month) to build students' knowledge and skills while normalizing active travel habits ^{30,31,32, 33}	*Scale up no-cost home retrofit programs for low-income households to provide heat pumps, insulation, and weatherization to reduce exposure to indoor temperature extremes and poor air quality, improve child health and comfort, and lower household energy costs ^{34, 35, 36,37}	*Protect and expand equitable access to green and blue spaces, parks, trees, natural areas, and water bodies, to foster healthy development, social connection, well being and resilience to climate hazards ^{38,39}	*Embed requirements for child health and climate resilience into government planning policies, such as building codes, and bylaws, especially for schools and childcare facilities, through measures such as low-carbon energy, temperature limits, passive cooling, ventilation, sustainable food procurement, green spaces, and heat-safe play ^{40,41,42,43,44,45}
Influence healthy public policy	*Ensure health and education policies provide affordable, accessible, and developmentally appropriate mental health services for children and youth, including counselling, community-based supports, and peer programs ^{46,47}	*Engage with diverse families to ensure climate adaptation and mitigation efforts are informed by lived experience ^{48,49,50}	*Advocate for maximum temperature policies or bylaws for all residential dwellings ^{1,50}	*Advocate for income-based solutions to ensure those experiencing health inequities or economic instability are less susceptible to the impacts of climate change ^{51,52,53,54}
Intervene to lessen harm	*Schools and childcare facilities work with local public health units and other partners to develop and implement all-hazards preparedness, resilience, and response plans to address climate-related risks such as heat, cold, wildfire smoke, poor air quality, and extreme weather events ⁵⁵	*Provide education to families on how to protect themselves from exposure to vector-borne disease (e.g., those spread by ticks and mosquitoes) while spending time outdoors ⁵⁶	*Ensure equitable, family-friendly emergency planning, response and recovery efforts that integrate food considerations along with child-specific supports to reduce harm ^{35,57,58,59}	*Address mental health impacts of climate change on children and youth (e.g. eco-anxiety, worry about the future) ^{46,47,59}
Collect and use data	*Collect school-level data on absenteeism, heat-related illness, asthma exacerbations, and learning outcomes during extreme heat or wildfire smoke events during the school year (September to June), complementing broader health data sources, to identify early signals of climate-related impacts on children and guide localized protective interventions. ^{60, 61, 62}	*Collect household-level indicators in local surveys and studies, and promote the use of resilience indicators related to determinants of health that influence children's climate resilience or vulnerability (e.g., energy security, household food security, housing quality, caregiver stress, and climate-related displacement). ^{63, 64}	*Assess, monitor, and map local health risks and impacts of climate change on children and youth, and identify drivers of vulnerability and opportunities to strengthen resilience. Use this knowledge to implement targeted strategies that reduce climate-related health risks and support continuous improvement. ^{22, 41, 65}	*Develop national or provincial children's health surveillance strategies related to climate change hazards that harmonize data on children's exposures, health outcomes, and resilience factors across regions to inform equitable planning, resource allocation, and long-term interventions. ^{28, 66}

*Interventions not included in the OEAR framework

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The strategic actions in this document are drawn from the [Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience Framework](#), which includes actions originally adapted from *A Health Promotion Strategy to Prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Foster Resilient Children, Families and Communities* published by Fraser Health Authority, as well as additional actions included specifically for the OEAR framework and referenced therein.

CONTRIBUTORS

This topic summary was produced by members of the Public Health Ontario ACEs and Resilience Community of Practice, with contributions from collaborators and subject matter experts, to support implementation of the Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience (OEAR) Framework.

Contributors: Charlotte Knegt, RN, BScN (Public Health Nurse); Bridget Glassco, MSc (ACEs & Resilience Coalition Project Manager); Sue Shikaze, BSc, HBOR (Health Promoter); Tyler Black, MSc, PhD (Environmental Health Specialist); Sarah Warren, MPH, BHSc (Health Promotion Specialist); Lauren Kennedy, MScFN, RD, CDE (Public Health Nutritionist); Aynsley Klassen (Project Manager, Ontario Resource Centre for Climate Adaptation).