

Climate Change, Mental Health and Ecological Grief



Frequent disasters, changing ecosystems, displacement and loss of identity will continue to have profound psychological impacts on Canadians.

Climate change impacts people's mental health, erodes their sense of well-being and raises their stress and uncertainty. As disasters strike and slow-onset changes challenge people's way of life, mental illness and mental health issues will be on the rise.

"Impacts to mental health could be among the costliest climate-related health impacts for Canada."

- Canadian Institute for Climate Choices, 2021

Mental illness is putting significant strain on health care systems, social services, and sector productivity across the country, today. With climate change in the equation, the future situation will get worse. More Canadians will struggle with mental health issues and require affordable care, robust support, and may need time off from work.



Climate change will lead to:

- More instances of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders and depression
- Stress and uncertainty
- Feelings of ecological grief
- Loss of identity and culture, particularly for Indigenous peoples
- Further inequities among disadvantaged populations who are more susceptible to mental health issues
- Strain on healthcare systems - more demand for programs, services and medications



Grief from acute disaster

PTSD, long-term anxiety disorders and depression follow major disaster events and can last up to 20 years or beyond following the trauma.



Vicarious grief

Globalized, instantaneous media broadcast disasters at a world scale, meaning that people witness disaster more often and grieve with those who have been directly impacted.



Grief from slow-onset changes

A sense of generalized stress, anxiety and sadness can overcome people as they experience changes to their environment and the resulting cultural, economic, and identity losses.



Anticipatory grief

It is normal, particularly for younger generations, to feel climate anxiety and a sense of hopelessness for what is to come if climate change action isn't sufficient and fails to mitigate challenges.