

# Public Opinion Research on the National Adaptation Strategy

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## Executive Summary, March 2024

**Prepared for Environment and Climate Change Canada**

Supplier: Leger Marketing Inc.

Contract Number: CW2319503

Contract Value: \$135,734.47 (including HST)

Contract Award Date: 2023-06-22

Delivery Date: 2023-03-28

Registration Number: POR 015-23

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Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Recherche sur l'opinion publique à propos de la Stratégie nationale d'adaptation : Sommaire exécutif, Mars 2024.

Cat. No.: En4-531/2024E-PDF

ISBN: 978-0-660-71260-4

EC24100

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# Executive Summary

Leger Marketing Inc. (Leger) is pleased to present this report to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) on the findings from a qualitative study and the second wave of the National Adaptation Strategy quantitative survey, designed to learn about the vulnerabilities that people living in Canada are facing from climate change.

## 1.1 Background and objectives

More and more evidence is pointing to the urgency for climate action, underscoring the need for communities to adapt to the changing climate and prepare for the most challenging impacts of climate change. A noticeable increase in extreme weather events across Canada, such as wildfires, extreme heat and floods, have made the importance of adapting to a changing climate top of mind for people living in Canada.

Under the strengthened climate plan, released in December 2020, *A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy*, the Government of Canada committed to develop a National Adaptation Strategy to create a more ambitious, strategic, and collaborative approach to climate adaptation. Released in June 2023, the Strategy outlines a shared vision for a more climate-resilient Canada, identifies key priorities for increased collaboration, and establishes a framework for measuring progress at the national level to help communities and residents of Canada better adapt to and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

A crucial part of determining what actions are feasible or would be easily adopted by residents is to first understand their opinions and perspectives on climate change.

A first survey was conducted in 2022. In 2023, a qualitative study was conducted through focus groups with individuals living in at-risk communities and/or who have experienced extreme climate events. The qualitative wave was followed by a second wave of the survey, after the questionnaire was updated in light of the findings of the two studies.

The focus groups and the survey addressed different objectives.

The focus groups were aimed at identifying the public's perceptions of adaptation terminology and actions, including:

- Determining and evaluating which adaptation terms, examples, and rationales resonate with people living in Canada the most;
- Hearing first-hand from people living in Canada who have experienced a climate-related event (e.g., wildfire, floods, hurricanes, extreme heat) or face the slower onset impacts of climate change every day (e.g., coastal erosion, permafrost thaw, degrading water quality). Hearing their stories, examples, and solutions that they find empowering and/or enabling will help ECCC further determine language that resonates with people living in Canada and develop future communications on climate change adaptation (e.g., toolkits, factsheets).

The survey was designed to provide ECCC with insights on:

- Whether people living in Canada understand the impacts of climate change and its effects on health and safety, the environment, the economy, and society;
- Whether people living in Canada are aware of governmental actions being taken to adapt to the impacts of climate change;
- What adaptation solutions people living in Canada are aware of in their communities and beyond, and whether they would support increased investments for these solutions;
- What language and framing resonates with people living in Canada in terms of adapting and building resilience to the impacts of climate change and increasing literacy on this issue.

This report presents the results of the qualitative study and the second survey wave.

The total estimated value of this contract amounts to CAD \$135,734.47 (including HST).

#### **Intended use of the research**

The findings of the survey will be used in the development of policies, programs and initiatives, pertaining to the National Adaptation Strategy to improve communications, to gain critical insights on the opinions, issues, and challenges Canadians are facing, and to better prepare communities for the impacts of climate change.

## 1.2 Qualitative methodology

Leger conducted a series of ten focus group sessions with French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians. Conducting the groups online offered the opportunity to regroup people from all the regions in Canada. All groups were conducted with individuals who have experienced climate-related events and/or live in a community most affected by climate change impacts. Five groups were conducted with Canadians living in urban areas, and the remaining five were conducted with Canadians living in rural areas. Overall, two focus groups were conducted in French (one of each demographic), and the remaining eight were conducted in English.

For each online discussion session, ten participants were recruited by Leger with the help of CRC Research professional recruiters. A total of 91 recruits participated in the online discussion sessions. All participants in each discussion session received an honorarium of \$125. All groups were held on August 8th, 9th, 16th and 17th, 2023.

Groups were held in the following regions on the dates specified in Table 1.

**Table 1.1. Detailed recruitment**

| GR | Region  | Recruits | Participants | Target   | Language | Date                   | Time    |
|----|---|----------|--------------|--|----------|------------------------|---------|
| 1  | Quebec + Atlantic                                 | 10       | 9            | People living in an <b>urban</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster (general population, including Indigenous representation) | English  | August 8 <sup>th</sup> | 5pm EST |
| 2  | Alberta + Manitoba + Saskatchewan + NWT + Nunavut | 10       | 9            | People living in an <b>urban</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster (general population, including Indigenous representation) | English  | August 8 <sup>th</sup> | 7pm EST |
| 3  | Ontario   | 10       | 9            | People living in an <b>urban</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster (general population, including Indigenous representation) | English  | August 9 <sup>th</sup> | 5pm EST |

| GR | Region  | Recruits | Participants | Target   | Language | Date                    | Time    |
|----|---|----------|--------------|--|----------|-------------------------|---------|
| 4  | British Columbia + Yukon                          | 10       | 8            | People living in an <b>urban</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster (general population, including Indigenous representation) | English  | August 9 <sup>th</sup>  | 7pm EST |
| 5  | Quebec + Atlantic                                 | 10       | 9            | People living in an <b>urban</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster (general population, including Indigenous representation) | French   | August 8 <sup>th</sup>  | 5pm EST |
| 6  | Quebec + Atlantic                                 | 10       | 9            | People living in a <b>rural</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster general population, including Indigenous representation).  | English  | August 16 <sup>th</sup> | 5pm EST |
| 7  | Alberta + Manitoba + Saskatchewan + NWT + Nunavut | 10       | 10           | People living in a <b>rural</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster general population, including Indigenous representation).  | English  | August 16 <sup>th</sup> | 7pm EST |
| 8  | Ontario   | 10       | 9            | People living in a <b>rural</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster general population, including Indigenous representation).  | English  | August 17 <sup>th</sup> | 5pm EST |

| GR           | Region                   | Recruits   | Participants | Target  | Language | Date                    | Time    |
|--------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------|---|----------|-------------------------|---------|
| 9            | British Columbia + Yukon | 10         | 9            | People living in a <b>rural</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster general population, including Indigenous representation). | English  | August 17 <sup>th</sup> | 7pm EST |
| 10           | Quebec + Atlantic        | 10         | 10           | People living in a <b>rural</b> area who have recently experienced a climate-related disaster general population, including Indigenous representation). | French   | August 8 <sup>th</sup>  | 7pm EST |
| <b>Total</b> |                          | <b>100</b> | <b>91</b>    |   |          |                         |         |

### 1.3 Overview of the qualitative findings

#### Attitudes towards climate change and level of worry

- A large majority of the participants said that they are currently worried about climate change. Most participants were concerned since heat records have been broken around the world recently. They were also worried because wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and other extreme events related to climate change are happening more and more, and the weather patterns seem to be changing as well (not the same amount of snow in winter, hotter and longer summers, less-defined seasons). Some participants also mentioned they were worried because more areas in Canada started to flood, even if they were not prone to flooding.
- A lot of participants mentioned that they are very concerned with governments who are continuing to prioritize the economy and are not doing enough to fight climate change. They also expressed their concerns about big producers and other countries that continue to damage the environment through actively harmful practices.
- Participants were also worried about the consequences of climate-related events on their daily lives. Moreover, older participants mentioned that they were more worried for the well-being and the sustainability of future generations than theirs.
- A few participants said that they were not concerned about climate change because they believe that the planet has been experiencing these natural courses of changes for centuries.
- A vast majority of the participants agreed that climate-related events were more frequent nowadays. Most of the participants stated that they have seen much more news on environmental disasters happening in Canada and around the world. Besides, some of them

reported being significantly more affected by heatwaves, floods, wildfires, tornadoes, or thunderstorms lately.

- Older participants mentioned that they have seen drastic changes in the weather (unusual summer temperatures and precipitations, hotter temperatures overall) and noted that the tornadoes or the heatwaves that are currently taking place in their areas never occurred in the past.
- Some participants were not convinced that climate-related events are more frequent because they believed that the climate-related events are over-mediatized on the Internet and on social media, which can influence how people perceive the frequency of these events.

### **Terminology testing**

***[...] means planning for and acting on the anticipated impacts of climate change. It involves making changes to how we live and what we do before climate change impacts happen in order to reduce their impact, as well as being more ready to respond to increasingly likely and frequent extreme events. It includes adjusting our decisions to account for the changes to the climate that we know are still to come.***

- During the second part of the discussion, participants were invited to evaluate different phrases and terminologies pertaining to the subject in order to determine those that are the most evocative. Participants were shown the definition presented above and were asked about their opinion.
- Across all groups, a vast majority of participants mentioned that this definition refers to the needs for preparation, adjustments, or adaptations to cope with the inevitable extreme events related to climate change. A lot of participants also see this definition as an urge to change their consumer habits and lifestyle to try to stop climate change or, at least, to minimize its impacts.
- Most of the participants also agreed that environmental responsibility does not only apply to individuals. Some participants expressed their frustration as they felt they were doing their part but felt helpless when seeing the negative impacts of big companies and governments on the environment. According to them, governments and businesses must be held accountable, and be proactive in the support and implementation of the required changes to protect the environment.
- Many participants felt that this definition was only a vague and general statement, as they felt it didn't provide concrete and specific solutions or explanations on how to be well prepared. While some participants noted that this definition is good and exhaustive, other participants thought that this definition is outdated because changes are needed now, considering how severe the situation is.
- Participants were asked to come up with a term that fits the definition, and the terms "climate preparedness" and "climate change adaptation" were among the most common.
- Participants were also invited to pick the term that fits the most among a pre-determined list. "Climate preparedness" was the term that fit the most with the presented definition according to the English-speaking participants, except in Quebec, British Columbia, and Yukon.
- Among the French-speaking participants, "Climate preparedness" ("Préparation aux changements climatiques" in French) was the least popular term and "Climate change adaptation" ("Adaptation aux changements climatiques" in French) was the most popular term.



- Those who preferred “Climate preparedness” felt the term was more active than “adaptation”, which was seen as passive. On the other hand, those who preferred “Climate change adaptation” felt that it was too late to talk about preparation considering the advanced stage of climate change.
- In a second polling exercise, participants had to rate the terms on the feelings they evoked (positive, neutral, or negative). “Climate preparedness” evoked positive feelings for the participants who live in urban areas while “Being climate-ready” evoked positive feelings for the participants who live in rural areas.
- Even though “Climate change adaptation” (“Adaptation aux changements climatiques” in French) was the most popular term for the French-speaking participants, it still evoked negative feelings for them.
- All the terms usually evoked neutral feelings to the participants who live in Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.
- Generally, only a few participants had heard of “Climate change adaptation”, and even fewer were familiar with the National Adaptation Strategy. The participants who live in urban areas had never heard of the two terms before. The participants who live in rural areas, particularly those who live in rural areas of Quebec, were more likely to have heard about “Climate change adaptation” or the National Adaptation Strategy before.

#### **Experiences with climate change impacts**

- Across all groups, a vast majority of participants have lived through a climate-related event directly, and all of them have faced some sort of climate-related impact, whether they lived through the event or not. Participants living in rural areas were significantly more impacted by climate change and its impacts.
- Types of climate-related events varied among provinces: in British Columbia and Yukon, participants were more likely to have lived through wildfires, those in the Atlantic provinces were more likely to mention floods and sea-level rise, while those in Quebec and Ontario were more likely to have lived through tornadoes, snow, ice and hailstorms, and high winds. Participants from the Prairies and Central Canada reported a variety of climate events, namely droughts, floods, hailstorms, and wildfires.
- Participants suffered different types of consequences in varying levels of severity: property losses (personal vehicle or house), material damages to the property (mainly due to floods and high winds), lost access to key infrastructure (road closures, damaged roads, power outages lasting several days, cell service outages, compromised water access), physical health impacts (asthma and respiratory complications from poor air quality due to wildfires), mental health impacts (feelings of helplessness, anxiety and stress over the observed losses and uncertainty of the future).
- Some participants mentioned the economic impacts of the different climate-related events in their industry: drowned or dried up crops, transportation and shipping delays, delayed flights, decreasing levels of tourism in the affected areas, etc.

- Participants highlighted the importance of the community coming together and peers helping each other in these difficult times. The importance of solidarity in the community was two-fold: to help those affected materially through food, shelter, and manpower to repair the damages caused by the event, and to provide emotional and mental support in these difficult times.
- Participants reiterated and insisted on the importance of sticking together and having people to talk to and help each other. They also mentioned monitoring social media usage as the content was often deemed anxiety-inducing.
- Preparation-wise, participants mentioned the crucial aspect of having emergency kits and stocking up on non-perishable goods and essential products for the events (floods, wildfires, high winds...) that could cause them to be stranded or lose access to necessities.
- Some participants stated they installed air conditioning units recently to face the frequent heatwaves, and air purifiers to help with indoor air quality when wildfire smoke is polluting the air in their area. Setting up the conditions to be alerted when an event is about to occur, and making reinforcements to the house when possible were also mentioned as key measures.
- A few participants also mentioned the work done by their municipality to better prepare for upcoming floods, like dike systems and floodwater retention systems.
- Some participants mentioned their feeling of helplessness and felt like there was not much they could do besides basic preparation.
- In terms of information, participants stated that their main source for alerts was The Weather Network and the Government of Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada warnings (through the same system as Amber alerts).
- A few participants stated the alerts were inefficient in some cases as they only received them after the event started, but most appreciated the heads up as knowing even a few minutes ahead can make a huge difference.
- During and after the event, participants used Facebook and other social media to stay in touch with their community, organize, plan, and share resources.
- Participants had varying levels of expectations towards the government and how they could help, with rural participants having the highest expectations overall and exhibiting the highest levels of disappointment towards the government. But several participants (across all provinces) were somewhat unsure as to what the government could do to help them prepare.
- Participants often mentioned they had no idea what the government was doing in terms of climate preparedness and wished they had easier access to that information.
- Some participants had a perception that the different levels of government were “passing the buck” and not being accountable for their own responsibility in the situation. Participants felt that governments used the lack of funding as an excuse for their perceived lack of action.
- Some participants felt that provincial and federal governments should play a role of support by providing the necessary funds and resources to municipalities and let them manage their preparedness.
- Some participants believed that a majority of the solutions came from the municipal level of government, as cities had to manage the problems that they were facing in terms of infrastructure resilience and climate event impacts. Several participants shared municipal initiatives in their

cities that helped climate preparedness efforts (municipally managed information-sharing smartphone application, dike systems, tree planting, etc.).

## 1.4 Quantitative methodology

This public opinion research was conducted via a hybrid approach, using Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) technology and Computer Aided Web Interviewing (CAWI) technology. Fieldwork for the survey was carried out from November 30, 2023, to January 24, 2024. A total of 2,024 Canadians aged 18 or older were surveyed, with a focus on those who have been most affected by climate change impacts. Detailed information on the communities that were included in the sampling procedure is presented in [Appendix A.2.5](#). The survey targeted the general population and individuals who have been most affected by climate change impacts, who were originally supposed to be targeted via telephone. However, considering the response rate and the numbers available, data collection maximized web respondents to help reach the objectives. Ultimately, the sample included 877 respondents living in a community that is impacted by climate change, making up 43% of the overall unweighted sample. The average length of interview was 12 minutes and 48 seconds on the web, and 19 minutes on the phone.

Leger used their panel to target randomized people for the general population and for the web portion and used their phone lists for the telephone interviews for the populations most impacted by climate change. The response rates for the web and phone portions of the survey were 9% and 13% respectively, meaning for every 100 web survey invites, 9 people completed the survey, and for every 100 phone calls, 13 completed the survey. Since panel-based samples are not probabilistic in nature, no margin of error can be calculated. However, for analysis purposes, statistically significant differences are included in the report as a reference, comparable to those obtained from a similar probability sample.

Weighting was done according to age, gender, province, education, spoken language, presence of children in the household, and belonging to a community that is most affected by climate change or not, to help readjust the sample for minor imbalances.

Leger adheres to the most stringent guidelines for quantitative research. The survey instrument was compliant with the Standards of Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research.

A complete methodological description is provided in the Appendices section of this document (please see [Appendix A](#)).

## 1.5 Overview of the quantitative findings

### Attitudes towards climate change

- Climate change is perceived as an important issue by a vast majority of respondents (84%), with around half of Canadians considering it very important (47%). And out of four Canadians, three stated being concerned about its impacts on Canada (77%).
- Two thirds of Canadians agreed that climate change impacts have become more severe over the past year (65%) and that they will become more severe in the next 5 to 10 years (68%).
- Future generations (63%), protecting agriculture and food production (62%), and conserving nature and biodiversity (52%) were deemed the three most important reasons to adapt to climate change.

- While respondents were afraid of climate change impacts on themselves, their friends, family and community (68%), they remained motivated to do what they can to protect themselves (83%) and confident that there will be solutions (62%).
- Around a third of respondents felt hopeless (36%), and a similar proportion felt they did not have enough knowledge about it to form an opinion (37%).
- Respondents from Quebec, the Territories, and British Columbia were more pessimistic and had overall more negative attitudes towards climate change, but Quebec residents were more likely to stay motivated (89%) and be confident about solutions (68%).
- Half of respondents said that they are part of a community (48%), but one in five noted that they are not close enough to people in their community to ask for a favour (20%).

### **Preparation measures**

- Around a fifth of respondents felt like they did enough already to help themselves and their family adapt to the future impacts of climate change (21%).
- A third of respondents (38%) have taken measures such as making their homes more resilient or adapting their activities to counter climate change effects, with a significantly higher proportion of Territories residents (65%) stating so.
- When asked about the level of familiarity they have with preparation and safety measures in case of climate-related event, six out of ten respondents (59%) report being familiar with how to prepare for climate change.
- Rated on a 0-10 scale, having an emergency kit (8.0), planting trees, gardens, vegetable gardens or rain gardens (7.8), and installing a generator, solar panels, or power storage (7.5) were the three measures considered the most helpful in reducing an individual's risk to climate change impacts.
- Regarding reducing a community's risk to climate change impacts, wildfire management (7.8), general emergency management planning (7.7), and stormwater, flood, or erosion management (7.6) were deemed the most helpful.

### **Climate change impacts and extreme climate-related event experiences**

- Heatwaves were the most commonly experienced climate-related event (54%), followed by high winds/hurricanes/tornadoes (36%) and flooding (34%). Around 23% of Canadians experienced drought, and 22% experienced wildfire.
- Those who experienced climate-related events were impacted through physical health problems (18%), losing access to a critical utility or essential supplies (14%), having house or property damage (14%), having to spend money to address the impacts (13%), and having mental health problems (12%).
- For almost two-thirds of those who experienced a climate-related event, it took less than a year for their life to return to normal (62%)
- Six-in-ten of them considered that their municipality took sufficient action (59%), and little over half of respondents agreed their community took sufficient action (56%). This number fell to 49% for provincial or territorial governments, and to 42% for the federal government.

- Around a fifth of respondents who have been most affected by climate change and experienced an extreme climate event expected more support from their provincial or territorial government (22%), their local government (20%), and the federal government (20%).

### **Expectations towards governments and National Adaptation Strategy**

- A little less than three-in-ten respondents agreed that enough is being done by all orders of government to minimize climate risks (29%) and to help Canadians prepare for climate change (28%).
- According to respondents, the most helpful information to know in order to better prepare for climate-related events are what to do when the event occurs (56%), where to go if utilities are not available (47%), and how to protect property ahead of time (46%).
- The federal government (29%) and the provincial or territorial governments (26%) were the main levels of government held responsible for communicating this information.
- Respondents were torn about their communication preferences, but SMS alerts (20%), television (18%), weather forecast app/website (16%), and the weather network website (15%) were the most popular.
- Awareness of the National Adaptation Strategy increased to 8% in 2023 (from 5% in 2022), but understanding remains low, as over two thirds could not provide an answer (68%).
- When talking about climate change and impacts, English-speaking respondents generally preferred the term “climate preparedness and adaptation” (31%), while French-speaking ones favored the term "Se préparer aux changements climatiques" ("Preparing for climate change") (35%).

### **Focus on those who live in an at-risk community**

- Respondents who live in an at-risk community were more likely to think that climate change issues have become worse (73%), but they were more motivated to protect themselves (87%).
- They were more likely to have taken measures to prepare their household for climate change (47%), but still feel like they could do more.
- They were more likely to report having experienced climate-related events, mainly high winds/hurricanes/tornadoes (51%), flooding (33%) and coastal erosion (12%) and to have experienced impacts due to these events, namely: losing access to a critical utility or essential supplies (22%), house/property damage (20%), and being physically stuck in a specific area for more than an hour (13%).
- Regarding the handling of the event, they were more likely to feel like their community took sufficient action (62%), but that the federal government did not (42%). On the same note, they were also more likely to disagree that enough is being done by all orders of government to help Canadians prepare for climate change (67%).
- In terms of communication preferences, those living in at-risk communities were more likely to prefer staying informed through the television (23%), The Weather Network website (21%) and the radio (11%).
- While they were not more likely to know of the National Adaptation Strategy, those who did were more likely to mention it includes solutions to reduce the environmental pollution (19%).

- Finally, they were more likely to consider they were part of a community (45%).

### **Tracking evolution of survey results**

Overall, results from the study remained stable since 2022. When interpreting these evolutions, it is important to keep in mind the difference in data collection questions and periods between the two waves that might impact respondents' attitudes and their recall of climate-related events. The main tracking differences include:

- A small decrease in the proportion of respondents considering that climate change is a very important issue for all Canadians (47% compared to 53%), and who are very concerned about its impacts on Canada (35% compared to 40%).
- A slight decrease in the proportion of those who feel that climate change impacts have become more severe (65% compared to 70% in 2022), and slight increase in the proportion of those who feel that climate change impacts will stay the same in the next 5 to 10 years (22% compared to 18%).
- An increase of the proportion of those who consider they don't have enough knowledge to form an opinion (37% compared to 32%).
- In terms of extreme climate events experiences, there was a strong uptick in the proportion of those who experienced wildfires or their impacts (36% compared to 19%), and a decrease in the proportion of those who experienced heatwaves (54% compared to 59%), flooding (23% compared to 34%), and coastal erosion (6% compared to 11%).
- Regarding expectations towards governments for support, there was a decrease in support expectations from the provincial or territorial government (22% compared to 30% in 2022) and the federal government (20% compared to 31%), and an increase in expectations from the local government (20% compared to 15% in 2022).
- A small increase in awareness of the National Adaptation Strategy is also to be noted (8% compared to 5% in 2022).

Detailed quantitative results can be found in section 2.2.

## **1.6 Notes on interpretation of the research findings**

The views and observations expressed in this document do not reflect those of Environment and Climate Change Canada. This report was compiled by Leger, based on the research conducted specifically for this project.

## 1.7 Political neutrality certification

I hereby certify as Senior Researcher at Leger Marketing Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.



Signed:

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Senior Researcher, Léger

Date: March 28, 2024