

# Extreme weather events will increase: Preparedness is key for the CISSS to help populations!

Results of an innovative research program on climate change and the organization of services to protect population mental health

## At a glance

Climate change is the 21st century's greatest threat to human health and well-being<sup>1</sup>. Extreme weather events (EWEs) such as heat waves and floods will become increasingly frequent and could lead to the collapse of health systems if no action is taken<sup>2</sup>, even in Quebec.

Populations that experience EWEs have several health needs, which include mental health.

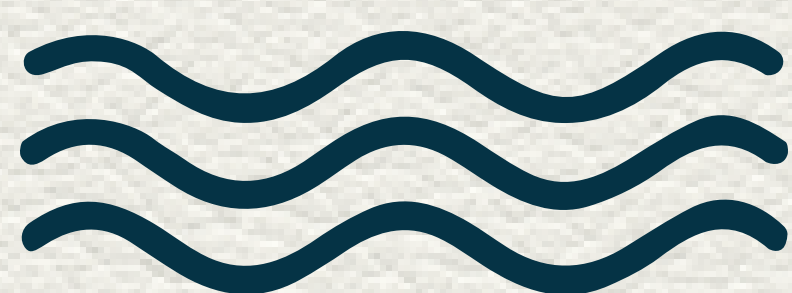
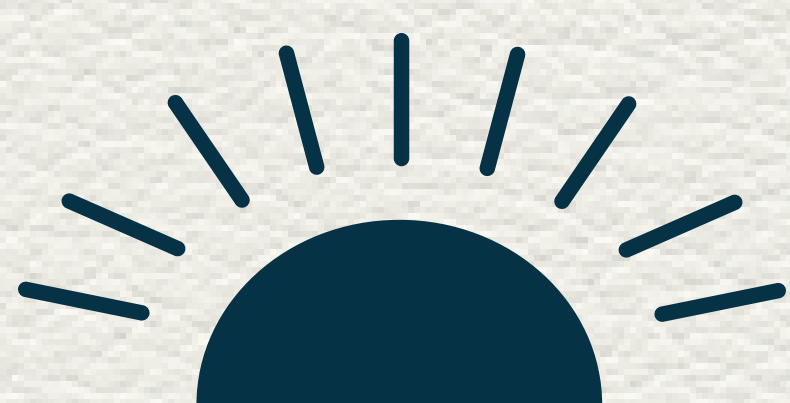
Prioritizing mental health from the start can prevent many other problems. Acting on mental health must be viewed as an opportunity to positively impact other issues such as the economy, physical health, community well-being, and the reduction of health inequalities<sup>3</sup>.

Based on events in the Chaudière-Appalaches region, a research team focused on the CISSS-CA's ability to protect the mental health of populations during EWEs. The results identify impacts, strengths, and challenges for the CISSS-CA and inform strategies for improving the organization's preparedness and building a more climate-resilient health system.



## Method

- ✓ 116 interviews conducted with key stakeholders and citizen partners
- ✓ Validation of adaptative measures by a committee of intersectoral experts
- ✓ Use of population databases to map psychosocial vulnerabilities related to climate change



## Results

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The researcher were able to identify the impacts of EWEs as well as strengths and challenges for the CISSS and its partners. Here is an overview of the results obtained :

### Impacts of EWEs

- Increase of stress and psychological distress in the community
- Rise in interpersonal conflict
- Disruption of social functioning
- Grief related to loss (objects, assets)
- Increase in consultations and hospitalizations
- Increase in workload for CISSS staff

### Strengths of the CISSS and its partners

- The CISSS is appreciated by the population
- The region has extensive experience due to recurrent flooding
- Telephone follow-ups by CISSS psychosocial workers make it possible to assess the psychosocial needs of people and to provide information on available services
- The various community support initiatives (e.g., proactivity of community organizations, mutual aid on Facebook) foster solidarity and citizen mobilization, which complement CISSS services

### Challenges for the CISSS and its partners

- Arriving earlier to support communities during an extreme weather event (CISSS proactivity)
- Breaking down health care silos, wich are still prevalent
- Clarifying roles between CISSS staff and partners (who does what and whan?)
- Ensuring the maintenance of services despite a lack of human resources and training, increasing the risk of burnout
- Supporting human resources who may themselves be affected by the event

## 6 Recommendations



1

Increase prevention measures and preparation for extreme weather events

2

Include climate change and the response to its impacts on mental health in the CISSS' risk management plan

3

Ensure clear leadership within the CISSS regarding climate change adaptation

4

Break down silos and mobilize all CISSS departments as the challenge is complex and systemic

5

Strengthen intersectoral actions within the CISSS and with partners

## 6 Recommendations (cont'd)

### 6 Use the tools created for the CISSS-CA :



Mapping of psychosocial vulnerabilities to climate change, making it possible to locate the most at-risk communities and guide decision-making (Link available soon on the CIRUSSS website [www.uqar.ca/cirusss](http://www.uqar.ca/cirusss))



Framework of 12 adaptative actions to mitigate the impact of climate change on population mental health.  
For example:

- **Raise awareness among the population, stakeholders, and CISSS management of the risks EWEs** pose to the health and well-being of populations and the importance of being prepared, such as by implementing a regional communication plan
- **Train CISSS workers and managers** on EWE-related psychosocial issues and promising practices
- **Identify a stable interdisciplinary intervention team** assigned to follow up with people presenting psychosocial needs related to EWEs
- **Deploy a regional advisory committee** for health promotion-prevention and climate change adaptation
- **Assurer une surveillance de la vulnérabilité psychosociale des communautés** face aux changements climatiques

## Conclusion

The implementation of intersectoral actions based on regional realities would make it possible to act upstream and protect population mental health, in addition to having positive effects on other aspects related to community health and well-being.

The CISSS must strengthen its capacity to deal with an increase in population mental health needs given the expected increase in EWEs and the various response teams that would be required.

The tools developed for the CISSS-CA will be useful to other organizations seeking to be proactive in preparing individuals and communities for climate change.

#### References:

1- IPCC, 2022. *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press.

2- World Health Organization (WHO) (2016). *Cadre opérationnel pour renforcer la résilience des systèmes de santé face au changement climatique*. Geneva (Switzerland).

3- Berry, P., Clarke, K.-L., Fleury, M. D., and Parker, S. (2014). Santé humaine. In F. J. Warren & D. S. Lemmen (dir.), *Vivre avec les changements climatiques au Canada: perspectives des secteurs relatives aux impacts et à l'adaptation* (p. 191-232). Ontario: Ottawa: Government of Canada.

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