

INCLUSIVE RESILIENCE: PATHWAYS TO BUILDING AWARENESS AND PREPAREDNESS AMONG AT-RISK POPULATIONS IN CANADA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Before, during and after disasters, the Canadian Red Cross works with people and communities across Canada to strengthen their resilience to disasters. Funded by the Government of Canada through Public Safety Canada, the **Driving Risk Awareness to Action and Building Resiliency for Vulnerable Canadians in High-Risk Areas** project, commonly referred to as the Inclusive Resilience project seeks to increase awareness of disaster risks and promote inclusive approaches, tools and actions that foster inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR) and emergency preparedness across Canada.

The project seeks to identify the most effective means to increase awareness of floods, wildfires, and earthquakes and practical actions to prepare for these hazards among women, older adults, people with low income, Indigenous Peoples, and newcomers to Canada. The project is implemented by the Canadian Red Cross in partnership with FireSmart Canada, Partners for Action (University of Waterloo), the BC Earthquake Alliance, Native Women's Association of Canada and community partners.

To achieve these outcomes, the project uses a learning-by-doing approach. The process starts with research to inform the development of messaging, tools, and delivery modalities. Next, these are tested by public awareness campaigns and community-based activities to measure uptake and effectiveness. The three elements are then adapted and retested. The project features four components: research activities, national public awareness campaigns, community-based activities, and a granting project.

For more information about the research informing this report, visit the Inclusive Resilience research study website: <https://uwaterloo.ca/inclusive-resilience/>

The Inclusive Resilience Report At-a-Glance

All people should have equal access to information about the kinds of natural hazard risks that may affect them, how to prepare for them, and how to respond to the circumstances of an emergency event in their region. However, previous work by the Canadian Red Cross, and literature in the field of Disaster Studies, have identified that certain groups of people are underserved and under-resourced when it comes to accessing this information. Subsequently, people in these groups experience challenges protecting their families and communities from natural hazards.

National surveys conducted by Partners for Action between [2016](#) and [2020](#) confirm and reaffirm that Canadians have low levels of preparedness for natural hazard-related emergencies. These surveys also show that Canadians have variable levels of concern for probable hazards in their region.

The focus: hazards and demographics

The available literature points out that it is essential to tailor an emergency preparedness message to both reach *and* resonate with those most at-risk of experiencing a given natural hazard.

With this in mind, the research team set out to learn more about how to best engage with and encourage five demographic groups in Canada to better prepare for wildfires, flooding and/or earthquakes: women, older adults, people with low income, Indigenous Peoples, and newcomers to Canada.

What informed the study

The research process included:

- a literature review,
- a survey conducted in five geographic regions (Bay St. George region in Newfoundland; Ottawa, Ontario; Renfrew County, Ontario; Thompson, Manitoba; and Richmond, British Columbia),
- seven focus groups in those five regions, and
- supplementary interviews in three regions.

Survey outreach included the five demographics identified above, in the five geographic regions. Each region was identified as at-risk of one or more of the following natural hazards: flood, wildfire and/or earthquake. Focus group outreach centered on three demographics: older adults, people with low income, and newcomers to Canada (≤ 5 years) in the same five geographic regions.

Due to the limitations of reaching newcomers to Canada (≤ 5 years) via telephone survey, the research team conducted supplementary interviews in three regions (Ottawa, ON; Richmond, BC; and Thompson, MB).

It is important to note that while Indigenous Peoples were included as part of community outreach within the five geographic areas of this research, tailored recruitment of Indigenous participants was not conducted. The data pertaining to Indigenous Peoples in this study represents only those study participants who self-identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit who also live in one of the geographic regions included in the study recruitment. A parallel study was undertaken directly by the Red Cross to inform its approach to the project and its work with Indigenous Peoples. This study includes a desk review, interviews with Knowledge Holders, and community focus groups.

Study insights

Review of the survey data, supplementary interviews, and qualitative feedback from the supplementary interview and focus groups revealed some consistent preferences by demographic:

Women

- Women are more likely than men, to report that they have many people they can turn to during an emergency.
- They also reported a high level of preference for emergency preparedness communications via social media.

Older Adults

- Older adults who belonged to a seniors group and/or community organization expressed confidence in their ability to learn about natural hazard risk preparedness.
- All older adults expressed concern about their ability to respond to an emergency event, regardless of whether they had a social/support network.
- Older adults are less likely to have prepared first aid kit supplies, but they are significantly more likely to have copies of their important documents.

People with low income

- Survey respondents with low incomes spent less time on emergency preparations than all other demographics studied with 65% reporting no time spent compared to the average 57% reported by all other demographics ([Survey Report Findings, pg. 33](#)).
- They are also less likely to have three days' worth of supplies.
- Cost is the most significant barrier to preparedness for people with low income.

Newcomers to Canada

- 911 was reported as the anticipated primary source of emergency response assistance for most newcomers to Canada.
- No newcomers to Canada reported having contacts such as friends, family, neighbours, or community groups to turn to for help in the event of a natural hazard-related emergency. Instead, they could only point to institutions (i.e. government agencies) or emergency services (i.e. 911-dialing) for expected assistance.
- Social media is a preferred communication channel to reach newcomers.

Insights from the focus groups with all five demographics:

1. The greatest barrier to natural hazard preparedness was denial and/or indifference: For example, the belief that one will not be personally affected by a natural hazard(s) in one's region due to a lack of risk perception and/or misperception about the hazard(s). Common responses: "It won't happen to me," and "I know I should, but I haven't."
2. Cost was the second greatest barrier to preparedness identified, and all of those who listed this barrier also identified as having low income.
3. The third greatest barrier to preparedness was a lack of awareness about the natural hazard risks in their region and a lack of knowledge on how best to prepare for an emergency event.

Insights from the supplementary interviews with newcomers to Canada and focus group participants:

- Newcomers to Canada share the same top three barriers to preparedness though the order of their relevance differs among interviewees such that awareness is the greatest barrier to preparedness, followed by denial and/or indifference and then cost.
- An additional barrier of “Other priorities and/or no time” was tied for the position as the third greatest barrier to preparedness.
- In interviews, most newcomers reported that they have not taken any specific actions to prepare for a flood, wildfire, or earthquake.

Of note, most focus groups and interview participants did not know of any public service campaigns promoting preparedness and response to floods, wildfires, and earthquakes, which suggests that they have not encountered such information. They did express that government – local/municipal government specifically, in the case of the focus groups – is their preferred source of emergency preparedness information. The research team asked participants what would help them overcome these barriers and have summarized their recommendations below.

Learning how to prepare / Recommended actions: At the community and household levels

Participants see the benefit of preparing for natural hazards with their communities in addition to their own, individual households. Community disaster resilience was defined by participants as knowing their neighbours, forming dedicated community groups for emergency preparedness (e.g. Condominium committees, buddy systems with seniors) and growing their collective knowledge of emergency preparedness through annual community events. The prominence of this perceived role of community in disaster resilience calls for a greater exploration of community partnerships in emergency preparedness campaigns.

To learn about their local natural hazard risks and begin preparing for a possible emergency event, participants:

- Highly desired resource materials that offer checklists of key items and clear, simple actions for preparedness;
- Requested straightforward instructions, accompanied by realistic, representative depictions of people in different housing types;
- Wanted more varied depictions of preparedness strategies for tenants (as opposed to the more common depiction of single family home ownership) and tailored resources for the context of apartment dwellings and/or high rises.

Some additional, qualitative insights are presented by demographic below:

- Women made note of the design components of preparedness resources more than men.
- Older adults more often raised concerns about reliable access to information resources during emergency situations, such as power outages.
- Older adults expressed a preference for physical formats of preparedness and response information over digital formats.

- Older adults requested modifications to the preparedness guides for those with mobility difficulties.
- Low-cost lists of emergency preparedness items are preferred.
- Newcomers sought brief instructions for emergency preparedness in plain language.

Call to action

This study builds on existing literature and recent Canadian surveys and provides qualitative feedback on how people in the five demographic groups want to engage and learn about emergency preparedness associated with floods, wildfires, and earthquakes. The emergence of generalizable findings for each demographic was limited by the complexity of studying five demographics across five geographies and three hazards. However, the report offers meaningful insights into how communication campaigns and community partnerships might be coordinated to better raise awareness and preparedness levels among women, older adults, people with low income, Indigenous Peoples, and newcomers to Canada (≤5 years) .

More specific work with individual demographics would build on our findings and contribute deeper insights. For example, another study might specifically consider cost as a barrier to preparedness among specific populations and examine its impact on emergency awareness and preparedness. The project partners look forward to learning from others in this space and collaborating on future projects.

The full research report publication will be available in 2023.

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About Partners for Action

P4A is a research initiative at the University of Waterloo that seeks to empower Canadians to become flood resilient by promoting awareness and preparedness actions that are inclusive and evidence based. Partnership is central to our approach: strategic collaborations allow us to focus on changing the flood response landscape at the ground level and with policy makers. As a thought leader and steward of Flood Smart Canada, P4A moves conversation and multi-level action forward by localizing community-engaged flood risk awareness and preparedness, partnering for adaptation, and developing flood resilience planning and foresight. These priorities will enable communities to access effective resources and innovative research, and ultimately, embrace inclusive resilience. Learn more about us at www.uwaterloo.ca/partners-for-action.

About the Canadian Red Cross

Here in Canada and overseas, the Red Cross stands ready to help people before, during and after a disaster. As a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – which is made up of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and 192 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies – the Canadian Red Cross is dedicated to helping people and communities in Canada and around the world in times of need, and supporting them in strengthening their resilience.

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