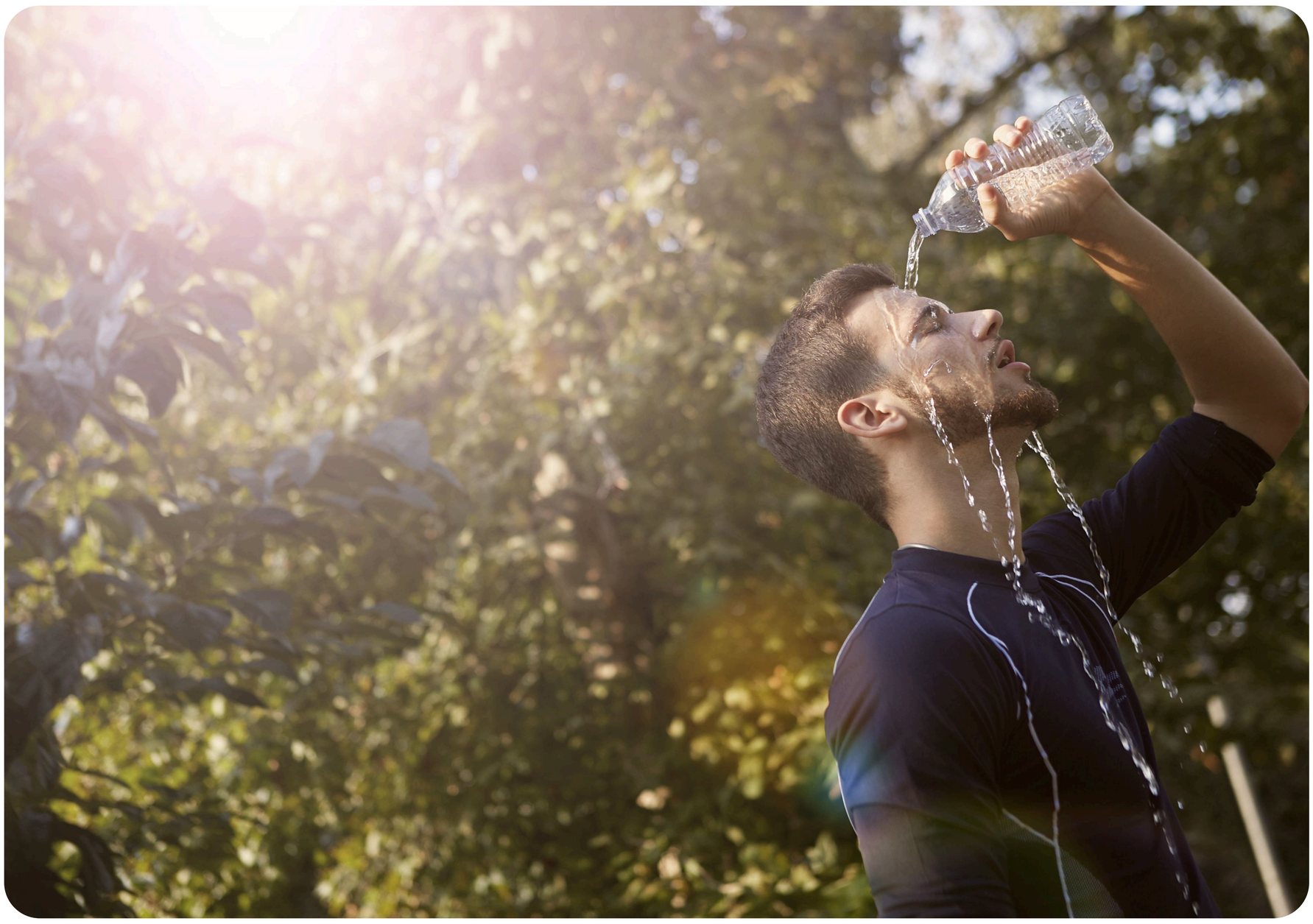
Updated Spring 2026



Climate Caucus

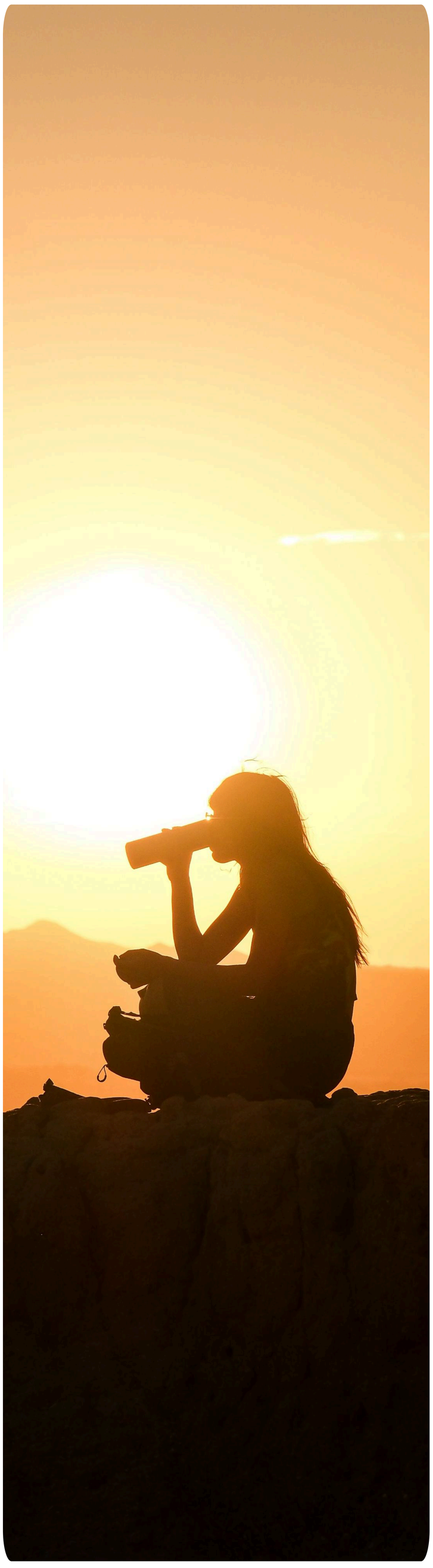
Extreme Heat Toolkit

Introduction

Climate change is causing more frequent and intense heat waves across Canada, even in cities with historically more moderate climates, such as Vancouver, Whitehorse and Halifax. These heat waves are threatening the safety, well-being and prosperity of our communities.

Extreme heat does not impact all groups equally, rather, it is a climate justice issue that disproportionately affects equity-owed and vulnerable populations, such as individuals who are unhoused, work outside, seniors and those have chronic illnesses including mental health disorders.

Municipalities can play an important role in implementing solutions that protect residents, leave no one behind, and build community resilience. **Explore municipal actions and best-practice examples in this toolkit.**



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Non Structural Initiatives

Implement a maximum indoor temperature bylaw

The basics:

- Require landlords and property owners to maintain a safe indoor temperature in rental units to protect tenants from injury or fatality as a result of extreme heat.
- Encourage property owners to conduct a cooling audit and work with tenants to identify best cooling measures in advance of hot weather.

City of New Westminster - Cooling Requirements for Rental Units

- Canada's first bylaw that requires landlords to maintain a safe indoor temperature in a rental unit occupied by a tenant.
- At least one living space in an occupied rental unit must not exceed an average of 26°C between 8:00pm and 8:00am.

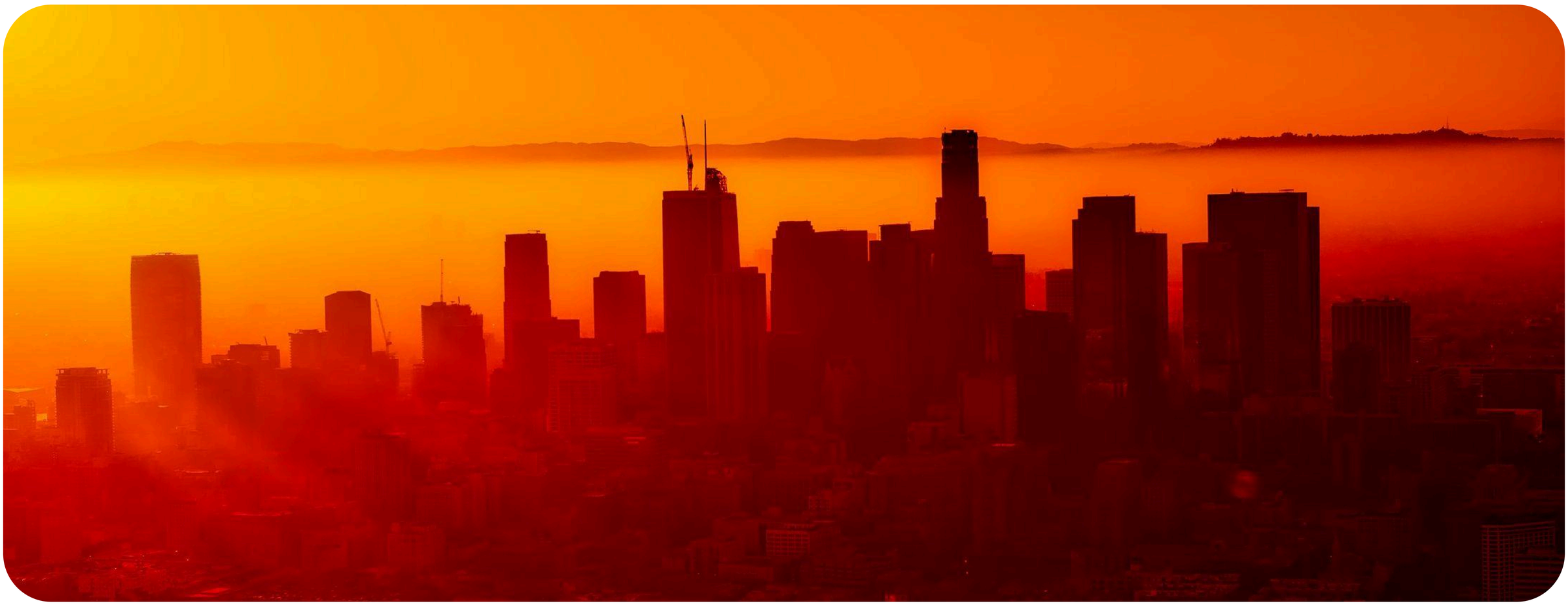
Assess and map vulnerability to extreme heat

The basics:

- Identify the risks of extreme heat in the community (i.e. mapping the location of vulnerable populations and determining the extent of urban heat islands).
- Use the results to identify where to focus response efforts.

Example:

- City of Winnipeg - Heat-Health Vulnerability Assessment



Set up Community Support Programs for vulnerable populations

The basics:

- Extreme heat does not impact all groups equally, rather, it disproportionately affects vulnerable populations.
- Several key demographic factors that lead to heat-related deaths have been identified, including:
  - Persons with specific chronic disease registries (schizophrenia, substance use disorder, epilepsy, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression, asthma, mood and anxiety disorders, and diabetes)
  - Persons 70 years of age or older
  - Persons who live alone
  - Persons who live in socially or materially deprived neighbourhoods
  - Person with no access to cooling
  - People experiencing homelessness
- Programs should focus on assessing vulnerability and developing strategies to ensure the safety of populations at highest risk.

Equity-Centred Examples:

City of Vancouver - Extreme Heat Initial Response Guideline
The guideline focuses on vulnerable seniors, and individuals experiencing homelessness and works with front line service staff to identify locations for temporary infrastructure such as water fountains and misters. Learn More

City of Toronto - Outreach Team and Heat Relief Network
Streets to Homes outreach team does wellness checks for clients who live outdoors, and can support in determining the closest cool space.
Heat Relief Network- over 400 publicly-accessible facilities where individuals can access cooling, such as drop-ins and community centres, and 24-Hour Respite Centres for people experiencing homelessness. Learn More

City of Hamilton - Engaging Landlords
Provides infographics to landlords to encourage them to support vulnerable residents, through providing a cooling area, posting health information in a common area and checking on vulnerable resident every few hours.
Learn More

City of Sherbrooke - Providing Multiple Cooling Options
Developed easy-to-access public cooling system based on vulnerability mapping and provides free transportation and paratransit to cooling centres. Learn More

Create a city-defined heat warning

The basics:

- Provinces like AB and BC do not trigger heat warnings based on humidex.
- Communities can create their own city-defined heat warnings by evaluating the weather forecast and determining if conditions (temperature/ humidity) are severe enough to create/activate a heat warning, even if the temperatures don't meet provincial heat-warning criteria.

Example:

- City of Lethbridge - City-Defined Heat Warning

Use education and outreach campaigns to encourage preventative action

The basics:

- Provide information / public messages on how community members can take preventative measures to prepare for extreme heat and stay safe during extreme heat events.
- Outreach can also target neighbourhoods with high heat-vulnerable populations.

Examples:

- City of Montreal - volunteer-based ‘Green Patrol’ raises awareness of environmental issues, including heat wave impacts
- City of Victoria - posts cooling centre information, prevention and response resources on their website
- Maple Ridge - posts recommendations on their website to prevent heat-related harms

Resources:

- BC Housing’s “Design Discussion Primer – Heat Waves
- Climate Resilient Homes
- Cooler Condos Guide
- The Canadian Red Cross’s website “Heat Waves: Before, During & After

Provide free AC units to vulnerable residents

The basics:

- Provide free AC units to residents at high risk of injury or fatality as a result of extreme heat, such as seniors with pre-existing medical conditions
- The municipality purchases the AC units and can partner with community groups to distribute the units and provide the option to help install the units to reduce barriers for program recipients
- Follow up with recipients to gather data on the impact of the program

Examples:

- City of Toronto - Air Conditioner Assistance Program
- City of Kingston - Residential Air Conditioner Assistance Program

Provide incentives to increase passive cooling

The basics:

- Communities can provide incentives, such as rebates, to encourage residents to prepare for or prevent the risks of extreme heat.
- Actions could include improving home energy-efficiency and planting trees.

Examples:

- Natural Resources Canada - List of financial incentives and rebates across Canada to improve energy-efficiency
- City of Ottawa - Trees in Trust program which provides tree-planting on private property
- City of Toronto - Incentives to build green roofs

Promote a neighbourhood emergency preparedness program

The basics:

- A neighbourhood emergency preparedness program can encourage residents to build a network to support their neighbours during an emergency and build community resilience.
- Neighbours can be the fastest form of support for residents.

Example:

- Regional District of Central Kootenay - Neighbourhood Emergency Preparedness Program

Develop an extreme-heat emergency plan

The basics:

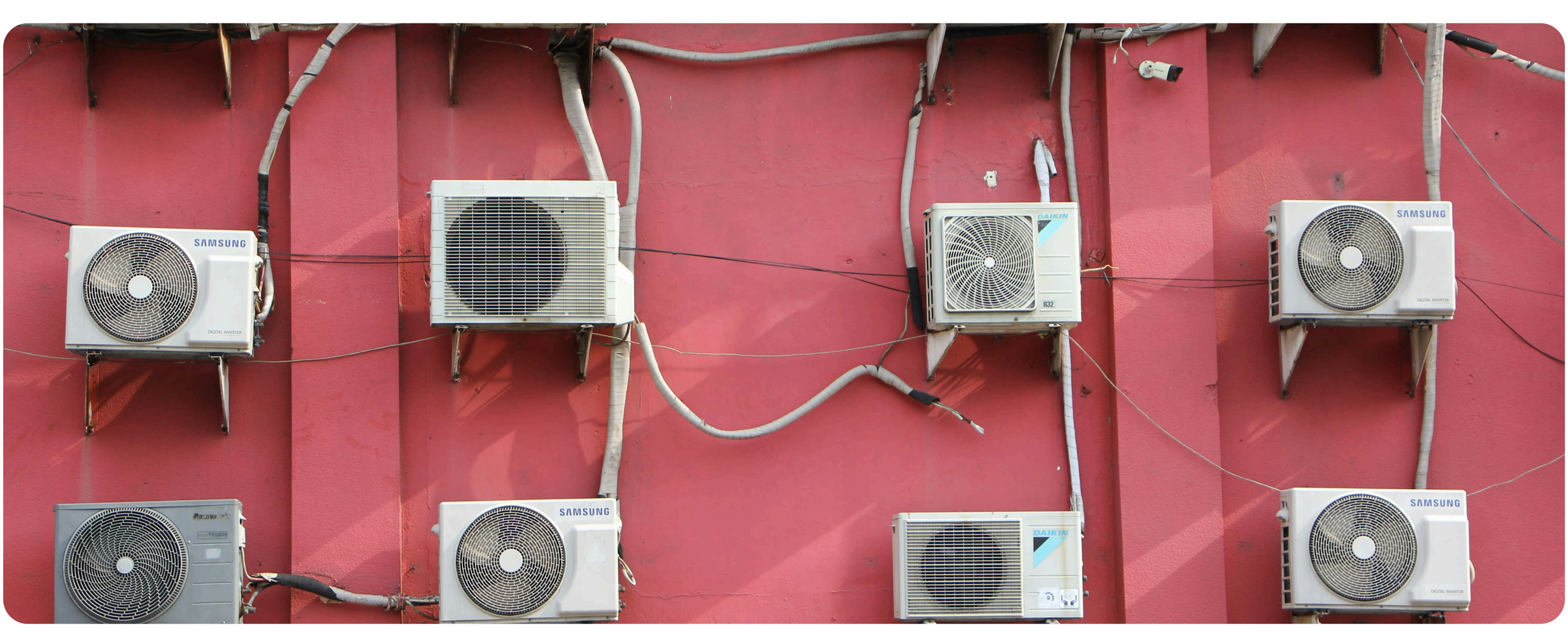
- Some municipalities have developed Heat Alert and Response Systems (HARS) to alert the public, facilitate community response and provide citizens with information and resources (Interior Health, 2022)
- Health Canada developed a framework that identifies core elements for developing and implementing HARS, including:
    - Community mobilisation and engagement, the alert protocol, communication plan and community response plan
- It is critical that measures address the unique needs and threats of vulnerable populations to ensure populations at highest risk are protected

Examples:

- Fredericton - Participatory Approach to Developing Heat Alert & Response System
- City of Greater Sudbury - Hot Weather Response Plan
- City of Vancouver - Extreme Heat Initial Response Guideline

Resources:

- Heat Alert and Response Systems to Protect Health: Best Practices Guidebook
- Communicating the Health Risks of Extreme Heat Events: Toolkit for Public Health and Emergency Management Officials
- Heat Event Response Planning



Green Infrastructure

Plant and maintain trees

The basics:

- Planting trees is one form of “preventative” action and can have many community benefits, including:
  - Reducing the threats of extreme heat events
  - Provide shading
  - Reduce the urban heat island effect, and
  - Increased carbon sequestration.

Examples:

- City of Kingston - using the urban forest to mitigate the urban heat island effect
- City of Brampton - plant 1 million trees program
- City of Montreal Climate Plan - “plant, maintain and protect 500,000 trees, especially in zones vulnerable to heat waves”

Resources:

- Nature-Based Solutions handbooks
- Tree Equity - Nature Canada Report

Expand vegetation cover

The basics:

- Reduce and replace artificial surfaces on the grounds and increase vegetation surfaces of various grounds, such as parking areas, balconies, and roofs.
  - Artificial surfaces absorb, store and re-emit more solar radiation compared to natural and vegetated surfaces.

Examples:

- City of Toronto - bylaw to require green roofs on new building
- City of Gatineau - bylaw to require islands of greenery in parking lots and permeable grounds in school grounds

Resources:

- Green Communities Canada - Depave Paradise Project - support projects that replace unwanted pavements with gardens
- Green Roof examples here

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Explore Other Climate Caucus Resources

www.climatecaucus.ca