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Transforming Government Organizations Into Model Low-Carbon Operations and Leading a Social Breakthrough

A Submission to the BC Federation of Labour's Climate Justice and Jobs Plan

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Executive Summary

Submission to the BC Federation of Labour – Climate Justice and Jobs Committee

This submission offers recommendations to support the BC Federation of Labour's Climate Justice and Jobs Plan by positioning public-sector decarbonization as a practical, fiscally responsible pathway to improving worker health and safety, advancing equity and reconciliation, and creating stable, unionized jobs. It is informed by frontline experience in emergency health services and sustained engagement with climate policy, public-sector operations, and the labour movement.

The paper argues that climate action should be understood not only as an environmental imperative, but as a health, equity, and jobs strategy, particularly within the current era of fiscal restraint. Rather than calling for immediate, large-scale spending, it emphasizes culture-first, low-cost actions that strengthen decision-making today while making future decarbonization more effective, affordable, and durable. It also outlines a scalable pathway for transforming public organizations into model low-carbon operations when conditions allow, with significant potential for job creation and long-term cost savings.

A central premise of the paper is that climate change is fundamentally a health crisis.^{1,2,3} A position supported by the Canadian Medical Association, the United Nations, and *The Lancet*. For public-sector workers, climate impacts are already shaping working conditions through extreme heat, wildfire smoke, flooding, and other climate-driven emergencies. Addressing these risks is inseparable from protecting worker health, service reliability, and public safety.

The paper further argues that climate change disproportionately impacts equity-seeking groups and is closely aligned with reconciliation. Elevating climate action therefore aligns directly with commitments to equity, reconciliation, and psychological safety, and should be treated as a core organizational priority alongside other established social commitments within the public sector.

The recommendations are organized into two complementary tiers:

1. Minimum Government Requirements (Feasible in Any Fiscal Environment)

The first tier outlines low-cost, immediately achievable actions that public-sector organizations can implement without major new spending. These include adopting Planetary Health (or an equivalent culture of sustainability) as a guiding principle, assigning senior-level executive accountability to a bona fide climate advocate, erring on the side of progressive sustainability in everyday decisions, addressing modern forms of climate delay, and embedding sustainability into routine operations and training. Together, these measures reduce stigma toward climate-conscious workers, strengthen organizational climate literacy, and build the cultural foundation required for deeper change.

2. A Scalable, More Ambitious Path (When Conditions Allow)

The second tier describes how governments can scale ambition over time when pursuing job creation, economic stimulus, or long-term cost savings. Examples include fleet and equipment electrification, building retrofits, renewable energy deployment, and climate-resilient infrastructure. This pathway is intentionally flexible, allowing investments to be phased according to fiscal capacity, policy priorities, and economic conditions.

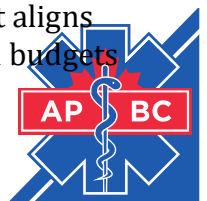
Importantly, the paper argues that a social breakthrough in support of climate action is both possible and necessary. This breakthrough does not require abandoning existing fossil-fuel contracts or ignoring current economic realities. It can occur alongside an era in which existing obligations are honoured, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty and geopolitical strain. What matters is building durable cultural alignment around worker health, equity, and long-term economic security, so that climate action is understood as compatible with good jobs, public service delivery, and fiscal responsibility. This alignment helps make climate policy more resilient to political change and more likely to endure over time.

Finally, the paper includes a call to action for the labour movement itself, encouraging unions to lead by example by adopting the same minimum standards internally. Doing so strengthens labour's credibility, supports climate-conscious workers within unions, and reinforces solidarity with communities disproportionately affected by climate change.

Introduction

I have been an advocate for climate action on behalf of the Ambulance Paramedics of BC (CUPE 873) for many years. Over the past decade, I have spent considerable time studying decarbonization and have gained valuable insight into the obstacles facing climate action within the ambulance service, government, and the labour movement. With this background, I have prepared the following recommendations for the BC Federation of Labour's Climate Justice and Jobs Plan.

The plan outlined below is designed to advance climate action in British Columbia in a way that aligns with the current era of fiscal restraint. It can be implemented with either modest or substantial budgets



and offers long-term potential to reduce provincial operating costs.

This plan begins from an essential truth: climate change is fundamentally a health crisis. The Canadian Medical Association, the United Nations, and *The Lancet* all describe climate change as the greatest health threat of the 21st century.

Equally important, this plan aims to spark a much-needed social breakthrough in support of climate action. Misinformation, social media dynamics, complacency, and the overwhelming scale of the crisis have all contributed to public disengagement. Compounding this, climate-conscious workers are routinely subjected to systemic discrimination in their workplaces and within the labour movement. They are ridiculed, avoided, dismissed, and their concerns minimized. The result is predictable: the workers most likely to champion climate action become demoralized, innovation is silenced, tokenism is reinforced, and the culture-first pathway (essential for cost-effective climate action) is obstructed.

The climate crisis carries the same potential for societal unity that mobilized populations during the Second World War. At minimum, given that equity-seeking groups are disproportionately affected by the health impacts brought forth by climate change, and that all workers face evolving and serious health risks due to heat, smoke, declining air quality, vector-borne disease, and extreme weather, it is reasonable to extend to climate-conscious workers the same degree of respect and representation afforded to other equity-seeking groups. Doing so would create a workforce empowered to identify and implement carbon-saving and cost-saving innovations, no matter how large or small.

The Government of BC should establish standards and designate personnel within its operations to ensure that climate-conscious workers are treated with respect and that Planetary Health becomes a guiding priority across public institutions. This can be achieved without major new spending. It simply requires public organizations to err on the side of progressive sustainability when costs are comparable, when long-term benefits outweigh higher upfront expenses, or when substantial carbon reductions can be achieved at minimal cost. For example:

- Including climate language in communications about extreme heat and wildfire events costs nothing, yet meaningfully strengthens worker and public engagement in climate solutions.
- An EV may cost more upfront than a conventional vehicle, but over a decade it is typically cheaper to operate and maintain.¹
- Allowing workers to plug in their EVs using existing outlets currently used for block heaters would cost an employer approximately 0.00018 percent of their annual operating budget, while enabling major increases in EV commuting and improving equity for climate-conscious employees.

If these steps are taken, then when fiscal or political conditions allow for large-scale decarbonization, the

¹ Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), [Businesses and Local Governments: It's Never Been a Better Time to Electrify Your Vehicle Fleet](#) (Oct. 22, 2024)



cultural groundwork will already be in place. The transition will be more welcomed and expected by both workers and management, allowing climate solutions to be implemented more quickly, with less resistance, and with far greater long-term success.

Finally, transforming government organizations into model low-carbon operations is not only a climate imperative; it is a powerful economic strategy. Electrification, retrofits, fleet modernization, and climate-resilience upgrades create long-term unionized jobs while reducing emissions and improving the health and safety of workers and the public.

What Is Planetary Health, and Why Should It Be a Priority?

Planetary Health is a framework that recognizes the direct connection between human health and the health of the natural systems that support us. Climate change and pollution are now among the most significant drivers of illness, injury, and health-care strain in British Columbia. Planetary Health provides a clear way to understand these risks and to guide appropriate action.

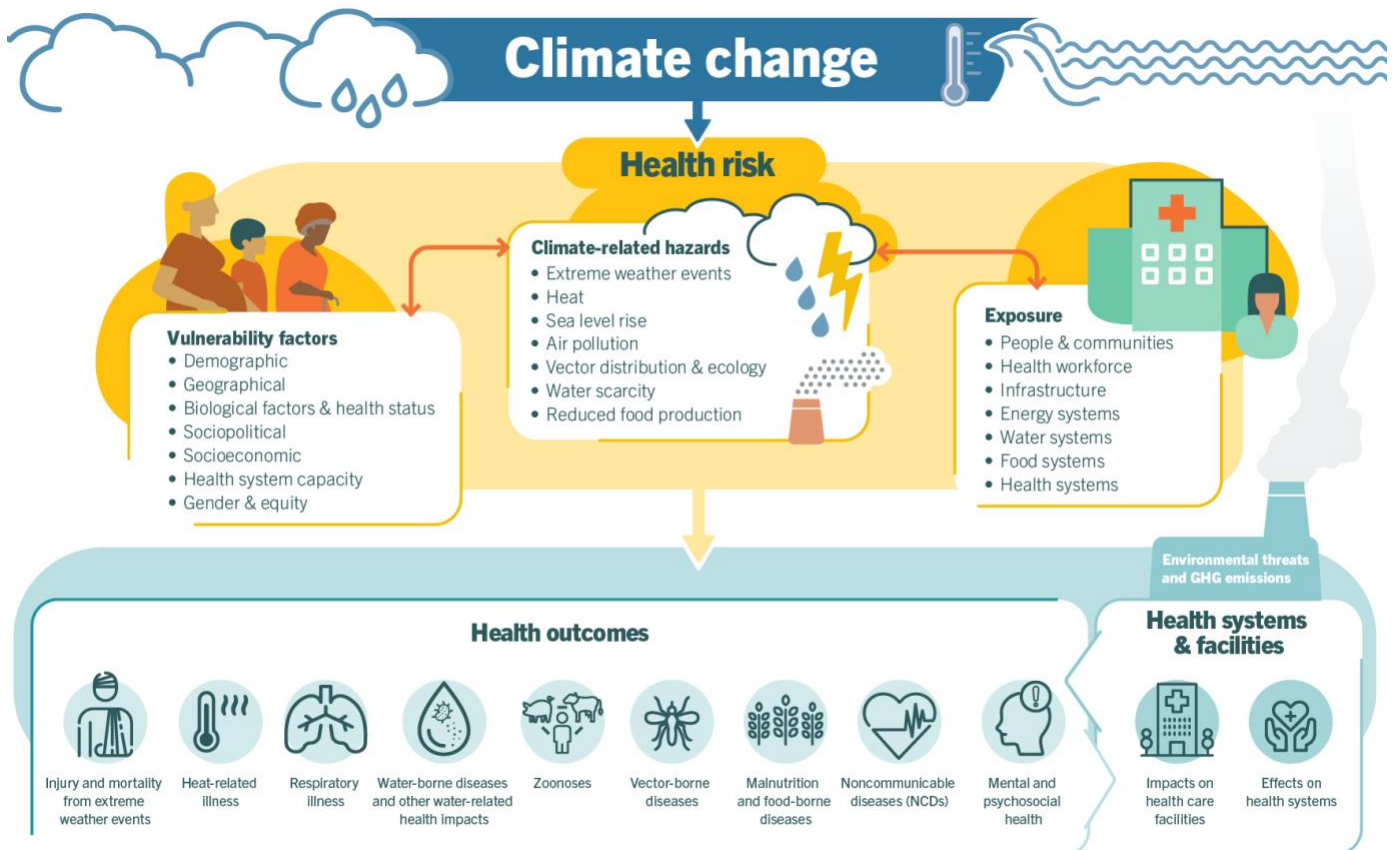


Figure 1. Climate change pathways and health impacts. Source: World Health Organization, *Climate Change and Health* (2021).

As David Byres, President and CEO of PHSA, notes in the 2023 PHSA Environmental Performance Accountability Report,² the principles of Planetary Health are deeply aligned with Indigenous teachings, which emphasize reciprocity, relationality with the natural world, and responsibility to future generations. In many ways, Planetary Health represents a modern scientific recognition of knowledge Indigenous communities have upheld for thousands of years.

Planetary Health is becoming a major focus across the health professions. It is now a core competency for paramedics, nurses, and physicians in Canada, embedded in national education standards and professional expectations. There is also a National Day of Action on Planetary Health, supported by leading health organizations such as the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the Canadian Public Health Association, and the Canadian Medical Association. This growing recognition reflects the urgent need to address the health impacts of climate change, including heat-related illness, wildfire smoke exposure, respiratory and cardiac stress, vector-borne diseases, and mental health impacts.

For public-sector organizations, adopting Planetary Health (or an equivalent culture of sustainability) as a North Star principle provides a simple but powerful tool. It ensures climate considerations are consistently integrated into decisions, operations, and organizational values. A clear guiding principle empowers workers, reduces stigma for climate-conscious employees, and creates the cultural conditions needed for innovation and cost-effective climate action.

Establishing such a principle does not require major spending. When reinforced regularly and shared widely within an organization, it builds a respectful culture of sustainability that supports better decision-making today and smooths the path for larger decarbonization initiatives in the future.

The Case for Elevating Climate Action to the Level of Other Core Social Priorities

Across government and the labour movement, issues such as equity, inclusion, reconciliation, and psychological safety are now recognized as essential organizational priorities. Climate action deserves to be elevated to this same level of importance. Climate change is not an isolated environmental issue; it is deeply intertwined with health, safety, social justice, and the long-term wellbeing of workers and communities across British Columbia.

Climate change is, first and foremost, a health crisis. The Canadian Medical Association, the United Nations, and *The Lancet* Medical Journal all describe climate change as the greatest health threat of the 21st century.³ For BC's health organizations and other public-sector organizations, advancing strong climate policy is directly aligned with the responsibility to protect public health. Every tonne of carbon

² Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA). [Environmental Performance Accountability Report](#). 2023.

³ <https://www.lancetcountdown.org/>



avoided reduces future health burdens associated with extreme heat, wildfire smoke, flooding, vector-borne disease, and deteriorating air quality. In this way, climate action is fully consistent with the core mission of public service.

Climate change also disproportionately harms marginalized communities, including Indigenous peoples, women, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals. Evidence shows that women face increased risk of domestic violence following disasters such as the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire.⁴⁵ Despite representing only five percent of Canada’s population, Indigenous peoples make up 42 percent of wildfire evacuees,⁶ highlighting the structural and geographic vulnerabilities they face. LGBTQ2S+ youth are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness, making them far more exposed to extreme heat, smoke, and severe weather events.⁷ Elevating climate action is therefore a matter of equity, fairness, and protecting those who are most at risk.

Climate action is also aligned with reconciliation and Indigenous rights. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which guides BC’s reconciliation framework, contains several articles that directly support environmental protection. For example, Article 25 affirms that:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters, and coastal seas and other resources, and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.”

Indigenous Peoples across Canada have consistently demonstrated leadership on climate action. They are disproportionately represented among communities driving clean energy development, and in 2019 the Assembly of First Nations formally declared a climate emergency. The AFN Elders’ Council also stated in 2016: “Mother Earth is in a climate crisis. We therefore insist on an immediate end to the destruction and desecration of the sacred elements of life based on the human obligation to care for the land and for future generations.”⁸

Embedding Planetary Health as a core organizational value is therefore not only an environmental imperative; it is a necessary component of reconciliation and a direct expression of respect for Indigenous sovereignty, stewardship, and responsibilities to future generations.

Because Climate-Conscious Workers Deserve Respect and Recognition Too

⁴ Women’s Shelters Canada / Canadian Women’s Foundation. [Research Snapshot: Lessons Learned from a Pandemic – Building Knowledge on Disaster Preparedness and Gender-Based Violence](#) (2022).

⁵ Anya Zoledziowski, “[Expect Domestic Violence to Skyrocket After the California Fires End.](#)” VICE (Sept. 25, 2020).

⁶ Government of Canada, *Backgrounder: [Wildland Fires](#)*, Public Safety Canada (Jan 24 2024)

⁷ **Egale Canada**, [Housing Among 2SLGBTQI People in Canada: Literature Review](#) (2024)

⁸ **Assembly of First Nations**. [AFN Resolution Declaring a Climate Emergency](#). 2019.



For climate action to be elevated to the level of other core social priorities, organizations must acknowledge a persistent cultural barrier: climate-conscious workers are often treated with a level of dismissal or skepticism that would be unacceptable if directed toward any other equity-related concern. Workers and union members are too often ridiculed, the severity of the crisis is minimized, and workable solutions are dismissed as unrealistic, unnecessary, or “too political.” Many have been called names such as “chicken little” or “greeny,” told that EVs will never work in their context, or denied even modest sustainability accommodations, such as the ability to opt out of massive convention binders despite digital copies being available. Climate advocates are also consistently overlooked for keynote addresses or welcome remarks at major union conventions.

These patterns undermine the psychological safety of climate-motivated workers and discourage open dialogue about climate risks and solutions. Supporting equity-seeking groups while simultaneously marginalizing those who advocate for climate action is increasingly untenable, especially given that the very communities unions seek to protect are among the most disproportionately harmed by climate change. To uphold their stated values of justice, equity, and worker protection, public institutions and labour organizations must extend respect, legitimacy, and meaningful space to climate-conscious workers as well.

Taken together, these realities provide a clear rationale for why climate action must be elevated to the same level of urgency and seriousness as other social commitments within the public sector. Addressing the climate crisis is inseparable from promoting health, equity, reconciliation, and justice, and public institutions have both a moral and operational responsibility to lead this work.

The Financial Rationale for Transforming Public-Sector Organizations into Low-Carbon Operations

Low-carbon initiatives, such as energy-efficient retrofits, renewable energy systems, fleet electrification, waste-reduction programs, and expanded use of telecommunications, commonly reduce operating costs once in place.⁹ They lower fuel use, cut maintenance and utility expenses, and decrease ongoing costs associated with heating, cooling, travel, and materials. While some upgrades require higher upfront investment, the long-term financial savings for public-sector workplaces are well documented and

⁹ International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), [91 % of New Renewable Projects Now Cheaper Than Fossil-Fuel Alternatives](#) (press release, July 22, 2025)



increasingly measurable.

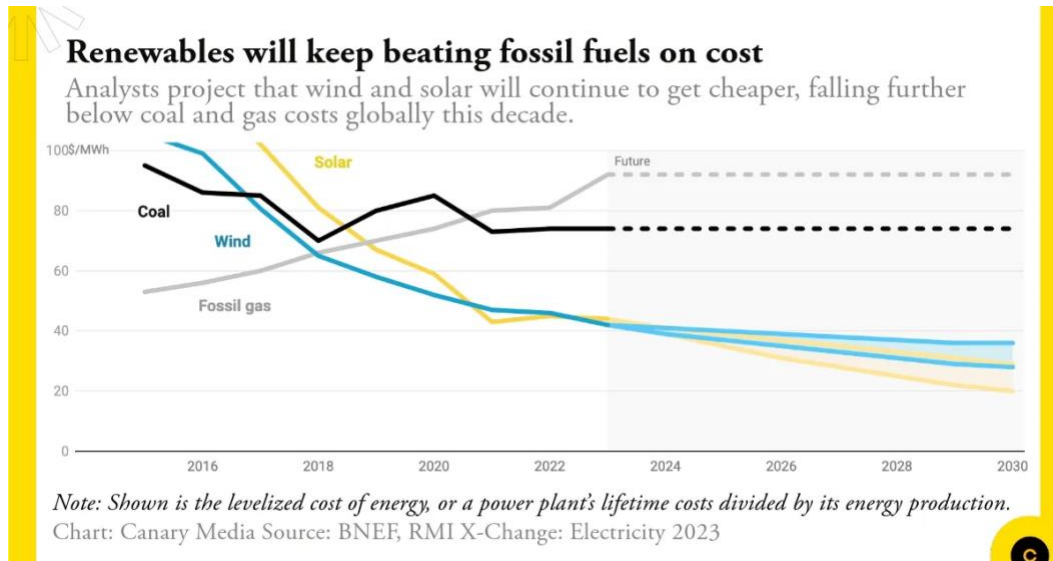


Figure 2. Renewables continue to undercut fossil fuels on cost.

Levelized cost of energy (LCOE, \$/MWh). Source: *Canary Media*, based on BloombergNEF (BNEF) and Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), *X-Change: Electricity 2023*.

Public-sector organizations are uniquely positioned to capture these benefits. Their long planning horizons and stable funding structures allow them to invest confidently in infrastructure that delivers returns over decades. Unlike private-sector firms, which often operate under shorter business cycles and tighter profit pressures, government operations can pursue low-carbon projects that provide enduring taxpayer savings and long-term operational stability.

Broadening Support for Climate Action Through Cost-Saving Solutions

Cost-saving, low-carbon operational improvements offer a strategic opportunity to strengthen the social and political foundation for climate action. While the previous section outlined the financial benefits of these investments, an equally important dimension is their ability to generate broad-based support, even among individuals who are cautious about or skeptical of ambitious climate policy.

For some, support for fossil fuel development is rooted not in climate denial but in concerns about economic security, geopolitical pressures, or the stability of government revenues. These perspectives can still align with public-sector decarbonization when it is framed as a matter of operational efficiency, cost avoidance, and responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.



By demonstrating that emissions reductions can be achieved while lowering long-term public expenditures, government organizations can appeal to a wider political audience. This approach helps normalize climate action as a standard component of good governance rather than a partisan initiative. Over time, broadening this consensus contributes to a shift in the Overton window, making sustained climate policies more resilient to political changes and transitions in government.

Positioning low-carbon solutions as both fiscally responsible and environmentally necessary therefore offers a pathway to lasting, cross-partisan support, and this should be a goal of the Climate Justice and Jobs Plan. This is essential for ensuring continuity in climate action across election cycles and for achieving emissions reductions at the scale required.

Minimum Government Requirements for Climate-Aligned Operations

(Minimum standards that are feasible in any fiscal environment)

To meaningfully advance climate action across the public sector, the Government of British Columbia should adopt a set of minimum operational standards that are feasible, fiscally responsible, and immediately actionable. These steps can lead to meaningful emissions reductions while also creating the cultural and structural conditions necessary for larger-scale decarbonization. Collectively, they signal that sustainability is a core public-sector obligation, not an optional initiative.

1. Adopt Planetary Health as a North Star Organizational Priority

Government should formally adopt Planetary Health (or an equivalent sustainability guiding principle) as an overarching value applied consistently across Crown corporations, public agencies, and other public-sector organizations. Planetary Health recognizes that human wellbeing is inseparable from the health of natural systems, and its adoption would ensure that climate and health considerations are embedded into operations, procurement, training, communications, and risk management.

Establishing a clear guiding principle reduces stigma for climate-conscious workers, aligns provincial organizations with emerging national health standards, and provides a shared foundation for decision-making across the public sector.

2. Assign Senior-Level Executive Accountability for Sustainability and Planetary Health

Each major public organization should designate a senior executive responsible for advancing Planetary



Health and operational sustainability. This mirrors the leadership structures already used for equity, reconciliation, and occupational health.

Importantly, the designated senior executive must be a bona fide climate leader with legitimate training, experience, and a demonstrated commitment to sustainability. Assigning this responsibility solely based on proximity to emissions-generating operations, for example defaulting to fleet departments that may be culturally oriented around conventional vehicles, or to OH&S roles without specialized climate knowledge, does not reliably produce effective climate leadership. Just as equity work is entrusted to people with relevant expertise and lived engagement, public institutions should not expect individuals without climate literacy or conviction to guide decarbonization. Meaningful climate leadership requires informed advocacy, technical understanding, and the ability to drive cultural and operational change across an organization.

Assigning this responsibility solely based on proximity to emissions-generating operations, for example defaulting to fleet departments that may be culturally oriented around conventional vehicles, or to OH&S roles without specialized climate knowledge, does not reliably produce effective climate leadership.

The designated senior executive must have clear responsibility for advancing Planetary Health and operational sustainability across their organization. Their role should ensure that climate considerations meaningfully inform:

- procurement and contracting
- asset replacement and capital planning
- emergency preparedness and business continuity
- training, curriculum, and professional development
- workplace culture, communication, and staff engagement
- strategic planning, risk assessments, and organizational priorities

This role must also include accountability for measurable progress, such as tracking emissions, reporting outcomes, and ensuring continuous improvement. Clear executive accountability signals institutional seriousness, prevents climate work from becoming fragmented or symbolic, and ensures that sustainability remains embedded in both day-to-day decisions and long-term planning.



3. Err on the Side of Progressive Sustainability in All Decisions

Even during periods of fiscal restraint, public-sector organizations can adopt a progressive posture by choosing sustainable options whenever they are cost-comparable, offer long-term financial benefit, or meaningfully reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This principle should guide:

- ensuring that climate policies are strengthened over time and not rolled back
- replacing fossil-fuel heating systems with heat pumps at end of life
- ensuring no internal combustion engine vehicle replaces an electric vehicle
- integrating climate context into communications on extreme heat, wildfire smoke, flooding, and air-quality events
- prioritizing low-carbon procurement when feasible
- ensuring that policy and procedure decisions take sustainability outcomes into account and support the long-term transition toward low-carbon operations

This expectation does not require major new funding. Instead, it ensures that everyday decisions steadily move government operations toward lower emissions, greater efficiency, and reduced climate risk.

4. Improve Awareness of Modern Patterns of Climate Delay

Public-sector organizations should help staff recognize modern patterns of climate delay that can appear in workplaces and unintentionally slow progress. Addressing these patterns requires care. The goal is not to suppress legitimate questions or operational concerns, but to encourage good-faith, evidence-based dialogue that supports problem-solving rather than discouraging action.

Constructive skepticism is essential to good public policy. For example, when it comes to EV deployment, raising practical questions about emergency power resilience, vehicle range, charging access, or operational reliability helps improve low-carbon solutions and ensures they are fit for purpose. In contrast, blanket statements that dismiss entire classes of solutions, such as asserting that electric vehicles “will never work” in a given application, shut down inquiry and prevent innovation before evidence can be properly considered.

Similarly, public institutions must distinguish between respectful debate and the spread of misinformation. Claims that deny established climate science, misrepresent the causes of extreme weather, or attribute climate impacts to bad-faith actors (for example, alleging that wildfires are deliberately started to falsely justify climate action) undermine trust, offend workers grounded in scientific understanding, and erode the credibility of public organizations. Government and labour institutions have a responsibility to ensure workplace discourse is aligned with broadly accepted



scientific evidence. Climate delay can also appear as performative workplace behaviours that mock or trivialize sustainability efforts, such as deliberately flaunting unnecessary vehicle idling or intentionally ignoring basic practices like recycling, which discourages good-faith dialogue and reinforces stigma toward climate-conscious workers.

Common patterns of climate delay that organizations should help staff recognize include:

- dismissing or minimizing workable climate solutions wholesale
- downplaying the severity or urgency of the climate crisis
- framing climate action as inherently controversial or political rather than a scientifically established necessity
- minimizing or denying well-established links between climate change and extreme weather events

Improving awareness of these patterns strengthens organizational climate literacy, protects respectful workplace dialogue, reduces stigma toward climate-conscious workers, and supports decisions grounded in evidence, public health, and the long-term public interest. It also helps workers better understand and respond to the real ways climate change is already affecting their lives and their work, increasing engagement with practical, solution-oriented climate action.

5. Embed Sustainability into Everyday Operations and Training

As reflected in CUPE National’s Environmental Policy, which states that every decision should be made through an environmental lens, sustainability should be embedded into routine workplace practices, decisions, and training across the public sector. This means adopting an intentional, impact-aware approach to how resources, equipment, and services are used, choosing options that meet operational needs while minimizing environmental harm wherever reasonable alternatives exist. This approach mirrors the concept of sustainable prescribing in healthcare, which emphasizes using what is clinically necessary while avoiding unnecessary harm, and applies the same logic more broadly across public institutions: use what is necessary, avoid what is wasteful, and consider downstream environmental and health impacts in everyday decisions.

In practice, this approach considers:

- sustainable driving practices and fuel-efficient operational behaviours
- minimizing unnecessary vehicle idling
- reducing material consumption and avoiding unnecessary travel



- increasing opportunities to recycle, reuse equipment, and reduce reliance on single-use disposables
- right-sizing fleets, equipment, and inventories to match actual operational needs
- incorporating sustainability principles into onboarding, training, and professional development

These actions are low-cost, immediately achievable, and well within the control of individual workplaces.

Consistent, incremental improvements of this kind can deliver meaningful emissions reductions long before major capital investments occur. Just as importantly, they reinforce a culture of sustainability by normalizing climate-conscious decision-making as part of good public service. This cultural foundation ensures that when larger investments become feasible, such as fleet electrification, building retrofits, or energy system upgrades, they are more readily understood, supported, and successfully implemented.

Beyond Minimum Requirements: A More Ambitious, Job-Creating Path for Public-Sector Decarbonization

The minimum government requirements outlined above establish a practical baseline that can be implemented in any fiscal environment. If the Province chooses to be bolder in its pursuit of decarbonization, whether to accelerate emissions reductions, strengthen public-sector resilience, or stimulate the economy through strategic public investment, these same principles can be taken further. This section describes a more ambitious, scalable pathway that builds on the minimum requirements and allows government to increase the pace and depth of decarbonization over time.

Rather than a single end state, this approach represents a continuum of options. Government may choose to implement some elements broadly, pilot others in priority facilities, or phase investments over multiple years depending on fiscal capacity, policy priorities, and economic conditions. At its most ambitious, this pathway positions the public sector as a driver of clean-energy deployment, climate resilience, and unionized job creation across British Columbia.

A Government-Wide Vision for Climate-Resilient, Low-Carbon Operations

A more ambitious public-sector decarbonization strategy would expand beyond operational efficiencies and incremental fleet improvements to include strategic investments in energy systems, public buildings, and infrastructure. Drawing inspiration from the World Health Organization’s COP26 Health Programme, which Canada has formally endorsed, this vision rests on two complementary commitments:

- building public systems resilient to climate impacts
- reducing emissions through low-carbon public operations



Applied across government organizations, this more ambitious pathway could include:

- electrifying public-sector fleets and expanding charging infrastructure
- replacing end-of-life fossil-fuel heating systems with high-efficiency heat pumps
- ensuring BC classrooms are equipped with heat pumps to protect occupants from extreme heat, improve air quality, and reduce operating costs
- modernizing public buildings through deep energy retrofits and improved ventilation
- installing renewable energy generation, such as rooftop or nearby solar, paired with battery storage to improve energy resilience and support the provincial grid
- incorporating climate adaptation into capital planning, including flood-resilient and heat-resilient building design where appropriate
- strengthening procurement standards to prefer low-carbon options and support BC's clean-technology sector
- reducing material consumption and waste through circular procurement practices that prioritize reuse, durability, and life-cycle value, alongside operational innovation

Together, these measures position the public sector as a backbone of BC's low-carbon transition while improving safety, reliability, and long-term operational efficiency.

Ambition Grounded in Fiscal Realities

A transformation of this scale may not be immediately achievable across all public-sector assets, particularly during periods of fiscal restraint. However, many elements of this more ambitious pathway, including heat pumps, fleet electrification, renewable energy deployment, energy-efficiency retrofits, and telecommunications expansion, deliver substantial long-term savings while reducing exposure to climate risk.

A fiscally responsible approach to scaling ambition would:

- align major upgrades with natural asset-replacement cycles
- prioritize projects that offer long-term cost savings or reduce climate vulnerability and associated costs
- phase retrofits over time, beginning with high-impact facilities (those with high emissions or energy use) or high-risk facilities (those most vulnerable to climate-related hazards such as flooding, wildfire, or extreme heat)



- leverage federal climate funding and strategic partnerships
- avoid new, high-cost fossil-fuel infrastructure that would be expensive to build, maintain, or replace

This approach allows government to increase ambition incrementally while maintaining budget discipline and operational stability.

An Opportunity for Jobs, Resilience, and Long-Term Cost Savings

Pursuing a more ambitious decarbonization pathway across public-sector operations offers a rare opportunity to strengthen climate resilience, reduce vulnerability to extreme weather, and create substantial numbers of stable, unionized jobs. Large-scale electrification, renewable energy deployment, building retrofits, and climate-resilience upgrades are inherently labour-intensive. As ambition increases, so too does the potential for job creation, skills development, and durable economic benefits across the province.

At the same time, these investments can deliver meaningful long-term cost savings by reducing energy expenditures, lowering maintenance costs, and avoiding damage, disruption, and emergency repairs associated with climate-related events. With reliable HVAC systems in classrooms, resilient power through renewable energy and battery storage, and climate-resilient public buildings, government operations become safer, more dependable, and better aligned with the realities of a warming climate. By scaling ambition over time and aligning investments with broader economic and workforce goals, the Province can demonstrate leadership, support working people, and ensure public institutions are prepared for the accelerating challenges of the decades ahead.

Leading by Example: The Labour Movement’s Role in Building a Culture of Sustainability

The labour movement must demonstrate the same leadership and cultural alignment it expects from government. To support a just and effective transition, unions within the BC Federation of Labour should adopt and model the same minimum requirements outlined for public-sector organizations. This call to action does not ask unions to exceed those standards, but to lead by example by embedding them within their own structures, practices, and culture.

Doing so serves two essential purposes. First, it strengthens the credibility of labour’s advocacy by ensuring internal alignment with the principles it advances publicly. Second, it helps create equitable and psychologically safe spaces for climate-conscious workers within unions themselves, while reinforcing labour’s longstanding commitment to equity-seeking groups that are disproportionately affected by the health and social impacts of climate change.



This includes:

- Establishing Planetary Health (or an equivalent sustainability principle) as a core organizational value guiding union decision-making, communications, advocacy, and internal operations.
- Assigning a senior-level executive or elected officer to lead climate and sustainability work, appointed through a transparent and democratic process. This role must be held by a bona fide climate advocate with demonstrated climate literacy and credibility, and supported by clear accountability and continuity.
- Erring on the side of progressive sustainability in union decisions and practices, including low-carbon procurement, reduced-carbon operations, and climate-safe policies that protect worker health and safety.
- Regularly integrating climate context into union communications and events, particularly when addressing extreme heat, wildfire smoke, flooding, or other climate-driven disruptions that directly affect members' working conditions and wellbeing. Normalizing climate language in these contexts helps connect lived experience to broader climate realities and legitimizes climate-conscious advocacy.
- Identifying and addressing common forms of climate denial and delay within union spaces, strengthening climate literacy while protecting respectful dialogue and reducing stigma toward climate-conscious members.
- Embedding sustainability into everyday union practices, training programs, and organizational culture, reinforcing climate-conscious decision-making as a normal and expected component of union leadership.

By adopting these minimum requirements, the labour movement can model the cultural and structural changes needed for a climate-aligned future. In doing so, it helps lay the cultural and organizational foundation for a just, worker-centred transition that protects health, advances equity, and responds to the realities of a changing climate across British Columbia.

Progressive Climate Policy as Institutional Strength, Not a Liability

Importantly, the institutional benefits of progressive climate policy are not limited to culture, morale, or values. Many of the measures that strengthen organizational resilience and worker well-being also reduce long-term operating costs. Investments in energy efficiency, electrification, reduced fuel dependence, and resilient infrastructure lower maintenance expenses, stabilize energy costs, and reduce disruption from climate-related emergencies. In this sense, climate-aligned institutions are not only healthier and more cohesive; they are also more fiscally efficient and better positioned to manage risk over time.



A culture of sustainability strengthens public institutions in the same way that reconciliation, equity, and inclusion have. It creates healthier workplaces, improves morale, and unites employees around a shared purpose. Climate action should not be viewed as a liability or a budgetary strain. It is an opportunity to build more resilient organizations, support worker well-being, and prepare the public sector for the accelerating realities of a warming world.

1. Supporting Worker Well-Being Through Collective Climate Action

Climate anxiety is now widespread. Polling shows that around 80 percent of British Columbians are concerned about climate change, and many public-sector workers experience this anxiety even more acutely because their roles increasingly intersect with climate-related emergencies such as heat domes, wildfire smoke, and flooding.

Importantly, research suggests that collective climate action (action taken together as a workplace or community) has a unique ability to reduce climate anxiety.¹⁰ Individual efforts alone do not provide the same psychological relief and can, in some cases, increase anxiety. What matters is the shared sense of agency: knowing that others are acting with you, and that your institution recognizes the seriousness of the threat and is choosing to respond constructively.

This finding creates a moral obligation for public institutions. If collective climate action improves mental well-being, then fostering a culture of sustainability is not simply an operational preference; it is a duty of care. Visible, organizational participation in climate solutions helps workers feel supported, reduces stress, and strengthens psychological safety across the workforce.

2. Uniting the Workforce Around a Shared Purpose

The labour movement has long understood the power of solidarity, the idea that people can achieve far more together than they ever could alone. History repeatedly demonstrates what becomes possible when societies rally around a common cause. During the Second World War, for example, workers and civilians across Allied nations mobilized at a remarkable scale, accelerating technological innovation, improving efficiency, and contributing to a unified national purpose.

The climate crisis, while different in nature, is similarly universal in scope. It affects every worker, every family, and every community. When public institutions frame climate action as a shared mission that aligns with workers' values and protects future generations, they help create the same sense of collective purpose that has empowered previous generations to rise to great challenges. This unity not only

¹⁰ S. Clayton et al., [“Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance.”](#) *Frontiers in Psychology* (2022)



strengthens morale but also encourages innovation and adaptability within the workforce.

3. A Progressive Culture of Sustainability Primes the Workforce for Low-Carbon Solutions

A strong culture of sustainability lays the essential groundwork for the operational changes required in the years ahead. Workers who feel aligned with organizational values are more receptive to new technologies, more willing to adopt low-carbon practices, and more likely to identify practical improvements that reduce costs and emissions.

This cultural foundation ensures that when major investments (such as heat-pump installations, deep retrofits, fleet and equipment electrification, or renewable energy systems) become feasible, the workforce is ready to support and champion them. In this sense, a culture of sustainability is not separate from operational transformation; it helps sustain climate leadership over time.

Conclusion

British Columbia stands at a pivotal moment. The climate crisis is reshaping the health and safety of workers, the reliability of public services, and the stability of communities across the province. Yet the path forward is clear: meaningful climate action begins with culture. By embedding sustainability into values, leadership structures, and daily practices, both government and the labour movement can lay the cultural foundation required for BC's low-carbon transformation. Culture change is not a separate initiative; it is the groundwork that enables all other climate action to succeed.

A social breakthrough in support of progressive climate values could be the greatest boon the climate movement has seen in decades. Importantly, such a breakthrough does not require abandoning existing fossil-fuel contracts or ignoring current economic realities. It can occur alongside an era in which the Province honours existing obligations, particularly at a time when economic stability and national sovereignty are under strain. What matters is building durable cultural alignment around the direction of travel, so that climate action is understood as compatible with economic security, public service delivery, and worker well-being.

The recommendations in this paper demonstrate that progress is possible even during periods of fiscal restraint. Adopting Planetary Health as a guiding principle, assigning executive accountability, prioritizing sustainability in everyday decisions, identifying modern forms of climate delay, and supporting workers through collective climate action are all low-cost, high-impact steps. Together, they strengthen institutions today while preparing the ground for deeper decarbonization when conditions allow.

There is also clear potential for greater ambition when the Province chooses to pursue economic stimulus, job creation, or long-term cost savings through public investment. Expanded fleet and equipment electrification, building retrofits, heat pumps in classrooms, renewable energy deployment,



and climate-resilient infrastructure can create safer workplaces, improve public health, and generate substantial numbers of stable, unionized jobs. These investments not only reduce emissions but also lower operating costs and reduce future exposure to climate-related damage and disruption.

Climate action is not a liability. It is an opportunity to strengthen public institutions, improve worker well-being, and unite people around a shared purpose, much like previous generations who mobilized collectively in response to the defining challenges of their time. By advancing cultural and operational shifts together, the Government of British Columbia and the BC Federation of Labour can help create the social breakthrough needed to support sustained climate action and build a healthier, more equitable, and more resilient province for generations to come.

