



**Friends of
Medicare**

Protecting, Strengthening,
and Expanding Public Health Care

Honourable Jason Copping

Minister of Health
423 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

July 4, 2022

RE: Alberta Must Do More to Prepare for Extreme Heat Events

Dear Minister Copping:

A year ago today, the province's record-breaking heat dome finally passed, providing some relief to Albertans who suffered under days of a relentless heat emergency. One year later, we are concerned that the Government of Alberta is not properly preparing for future extreme heat events.

During 2021's heat dome, hundreds of people in western Canada died from extreme heat, with seniors and unhoused communities among the most vulnerable and impacted. The BC Coroners Service reported 619 heat-related deaths in British Columbia, [the vast majority of whom were seniors](#). In Alberta, it is estimated that the [heat dome resulted in 66 deaths](#), but no comprehensive data or analysis has been released.

Extreme heat emergencies are public health emergencies and must be treated as such. Last year's heat dome put undue stress on our hospitals and EMS system at a time when our health care system was already under severe strain. We must do more to ensure that we don't experience a repeat this summer. Alberta has been lucky to avoid extreme temperatures so far this year, but we are squandering the opportunity to prepare.

Good data makes for better decision-making; it is crucial that the Government of Alberta release better data on fatalities during heat emergencies, to inform a coordinated provincial public response to heat waves. We need only to look next door to British Columbia for what a provincial government could be doing.

Following last summer's heat dome, a review panel was convened in B.C. Their report to the Chief Coroner of British Columbia, titled "Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in B.C. in Summer 2021" [made many recommendations to prevent such tragedies in the future](#).

In response, the B.C. provincial government has made several commitments, including implementing a provincially coordinated response, a provincial heat emergency alert system, and adding more paramedics and vehicles to the ambulance system to respond to anticipated surges in 911 calls during heat emergencies.

The City of Vancouver has also [announced measures](#) to deal with extreme heat ensuring a more proactive approach that includes indoor cooling spaces, increased access to outdoor and shaded public spaces, access to water, and targeted funding to support those more vulnerable Downtown Eastside residents.

Municipalities have an important role to play in protecting residents from extreme heat, but this can't be left to municipalities and community agencies alone. We require a provincially coordinated public response to safeguard our public health care system and protect Albertans.

The escalating impact of climate change means heat waves will only become more common and more intense. Hundreds of seniors dying due to extreme heat should not be the norm. Allowing unhoused community members to suffer should not be the norm. Albertans need a coordinated approach, with a short-term commitment to action and a longer-term risk mitigation strategy.

We urge you and your government to follow the lead of jurisdictions like British Columbia, and to act to prepare Alberta against future heat emergencies.

Sincerely,

Chris Gallaway
Executive Director
Friends of Medicare

CC: David Shepherd, Opposition Critic for Health
CC: Amarjeet Sohi, Mayor of Edmonton and Council Members
CC: Jyoti Gondek, Mayor of Calgary and Council Members