



Dear Medical Officers of Health:

I am writing at a critical time in our history, with an essential but perhaps unusual message.

In less than 100 days, 192 countries will meet to thrash out a global agreement to avert catastrophic climate change. This is a historical occasion, the outcome of which will shape the course of human health and development forever. Post the Copenhagen negotiations, we must immediately embark on a massive cultural transformation – one that rapidly yields a low carbon future, and peace, prosperity and health for all.

If we are to succeed, we must all – all of us – play our part.

As health professionals, we have an essential role and capacity to contribute to the collective response to climate change.

We should be especially concerned about the effects of climate change on human health. They are many and potentially severe. At its worst, climate change will cause death and disease for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. In Canada, we are relatively better protected from these health effects, at least in the near-term, but we are not immune. Moreover, we have all committed to *primum non nocere* – to “first, do no harm”. In upholding our commitment, we must take aggressive action to slow and prevent the massive harm that climate change threatens to cause.

As highly respected and trusted professionals with a reach and prominence in communities across Canada, we have the opportunity to promote positive changes on many levels. This includes by adding our voices to the calls for stronger climate protection policies at all levels of government, by working toward healthier public policy more generally, by greening the health care system (which is a massive energy user and polluter) and by actively participating in reshaping the cultural underpinnings that are at the root of the climate crisis. These are all essential contributions for resolving the climate crisis, and should be essential to our good health professional practice.

The good news, if we can call it that, is that our work on climate change is very much complementary to our work on many other important health issues that we have embraced. Former California Health Officer Dr. Richard Jackson speaks incisively to this fact: “What’s good for our kids and their health and what’s good for their neighbourhood, school, and our city, state, nation and planet are all the same thing”.

I urge us all to embrace the climate change issue and to act on it however appropriate, both in our individual capacity as citizens and in our unique capacity as health professionals.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Predy", written over a white background.

G. Predy, MD, FRCPC
Senior Medical Officer of Health