Strengthening Federal Leadership in Emergency Management

Submission to Public Safety Canada

Introduction

The Canadian Institute of Planners appreciates the opportunity to contribute to PSC's engagement on strengthening federal leadership in emergency management. CIP represents nearly 10,000 professional planners working from coast-to-coast-to-coast in roles that shape land use, infrastructure, housing, and community development, all of which influence a community's resilience to natural hazards and climate change impacts. Proactive land use planning that incorporates hazard and risk into development decisions supports resilience co-benefits across disciplines and can help minimize the burden on emergency managers.

The following remarks reflect insights gathered through CIP's Climate Adaptation & Mitigation National Policy Working Group, which brought together planners from diverse regions and specialties in Summer 2025. We recently shared a draft of our submission with the working group and planners with expertise in emergency management to capture any new insights from the previous year. The following observations highlight recurring challenges and opportunities identified across the planning profession.

1. Federal Leadership and Coordination

What should the federal government's role in emergency management look like in the future?

The federal government has a key role to play in strengthening coordination across jurisdictions and supporting local capacity for climate adaptation and emergency management. Climate change impacts and natural hazards often extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries, which necessitates more integrated approaches across orders of government. There are opportunities to support more consistent integration of climate risk considerations across funding programs and to ensure that municipal/regional governments have the resources and capacity needed to implement risk-reduction measures. There is also an opportunity to support more consistent communication of climate risk and emergency management measures, recognizing the federal government's unique role in aligning messaging across jurisdictions and improving public understanding.

How could the federal government strengthen its role in emergency management?

The federal government can strengthen its role by improving the integration of climate risk considerations across funding programs and supporting more coordinated approaches to risk reduction.

This could include:

- Supporting the development of national standards and coordinated approaches to climate risk data and hazard mapping, including leadership in the integration of provincial and territorial datasets. This can help support more informed land use decisions, including identifying areas to avoid or mitigate risk.
- Strengthening the integration of climate risk considerations into federal funding programs through the use of clear requirements or criteria that ensure funded initiatives account for climate risk and incorporate adaptation measures where appropriate.
- Offering more intentional investment in, and coordination of, proactive risk reduction measures (including land use planning) to reduce the need for costly emergency response and recovery efforts.
- Highlighting opportunities to link emergency management measures to the programs and practices that communities already prioritize (e.g., land use planning, wildfire safety, flood protection, economic development).
- Amending the National Building Code to prohibit construction in flood plains and other hazard areas and mandate the implementation of FireSmart Canada guidelines for new developments.

What tools or structures could improve coordination inside the federal government and with other jurisdictions before and during emergencies?

Coordination can be improved through more consistent data, shared tools, and strengthened knowledge-sharing mechanisms across all levels of government. Professional planners have identified challenges related to fragmented data, inconsistent methodologies, and limited access to practical tools, all of which can make it difficult to make informed, coordinated decisions. By strengthening national approaches to climate risk data and hazard mapping and making strategic investments in centralized repositories and training initiatives, the federal government can help ensure that practitioners at all levels have access to the information needed to support more coordinated emergency management and risk reduction efforts.

The federal strategy should also include the development of a pan-Canadian real-time registry of deployable personnel, teams, assets, and specialized capabilities across provinces and territories. This registry should be integrated with existing programs such as Nova Scotia Guard, Ontario Corps, and Quebec's RIUSC, and accessible by partners.

2. Building Capacity and Partnerships

How should federal programs and capabilities evolve to address current and emerging risks, including climate-related disasters?

Federal capabilities and programs should evolve to better reflect the need for proactive, integrated, and accessible approaches to shared goals of risk reduction and climate adaptation, including in the context of increasingly complex and overlapping risks. In developing and maintaining programming, the federal government should recognize jurisdictional differences in accessing existing supports and align program design with the administrative realities of smaller or under-resourced communities to improve accessibility and uptake. There remains a need to prioritize investment in upstream risk-reduction initiatives, such as land use planning, recognizing that these measures will reduce long-term emergency management response and recovery costs.

Further, supporting the use of nature-based/green infrastructure solutions as levers for resilience—particularly for hazards such as flooding and extreme heat—helps ensure that housing and infrastructure development initiatives remain resilient and functional across communities. To support implementation at the community level, the federal government should also incorporate planning expertise into emergency management programs and policy development, including more intentional engagement with the planning profession across program design and delivery.

What approaches could strengthen local capacity and preparedness in provinces, territories, municipalities, and Indigenous communities?

To strengthen local capacity and preparedness, the federal government has a role to play in improving access to funding and technical resources, investing in training and capacity-building initiatives, and supporting more integrated planning and decision-making at the community level. Greater efforts should be made to include Indigenous communities and knowledge systems in planning and response, recognizing their leadership, expertise, and unique contributions to resilience.

Across municipalities, planners face constraints on staffing, expertise, and program accessibility, which can limit their ability to implement climate adaptation and risk-reduction measures, particularly in small, rural, remote, Northern, and Indigenous communities that face disproportionate risks and capacity constraints.

These challenges can be addressed by aligning program design with local administrative realities and incorporating planning expertise into emergency management systems at all levels of government. This collaboration across disciplines will create mutually beneficial resilience outcomes, remove jurisdictional barriers, and better support community needs. There may also be opportunities for the federal government to use policy and program requirements to more consistently embed climate considerations, thereby supporting local capacity by creating clearer expectations and reducing the need for internal advocacy at the community level.

What role can the federal government play in fostering public–private collaboration and community-level resilience for all Canadians?

The federal government can foster collaboration by supporting more integrated approaches across sectors and strengthening connections between policy, planning, and implementation. Planners, engineers, emergency managers, climate action specialists, and other industry partners all work at different intersections of emergency management and risk reduction, and improved coordination between these groups can help ensure that resilience measures are practical and effective at the community level.

The federal government can also shape how climate risk and emergency preparedness efforts are communicated, and can support more consistent, integrated messaging that aligns resilience efforts with broader priorities such as housing, infrastructure, and economic development. Greater engagement with the planning profession and other practitioners will help align federal initiatives with on-the-ground realities and support more consistent implementation.

3. Enhancing Risk Awareness and Public Readiness

What can the federal government do to improve risk communication and individual preparedness?

To improve risk communication, the federal government can help develop and disseminate more consistent and accessible messaging that connects climate risk to community-level impacts. Planners have highlighted that current communication strategies can be abstract or overly focused on long-term risks, which may not translate effectively to public understanding and meaningful engagement. There are opportunities to link emergency management messaging to issues communities already prioritize, such as public safety, affordability, and economic resilience. There may also be opportunities to draw on planners' expertise in community engagement to support more inclusive and equitable communication approaches, particularly for individuals and communities facing higher levels of risk and vulnerability.

How can data, technology, and research be leveraged to strengthen decision-making and disaster risk reduction?

Data, technology, and research can directly influence decision-making by improving access to consistent, high-quality information that can be applied in early land use planning stages at the local level. Working across municipalities and regions with varying hazard exposure, climate change risks, and operational capacities, planners have identified challenges related

to fragmented hazard and risk data, inconsistent methodologies, and limited access to practical tools. These variables make it difficult to assess and respond to risk effectively. Strengthening national approaches to data standardization and improving access to/investing in adaptive tools and resources can help support more coordinated and evidence-based decision-making. There may also be opportunities to ensure that data is accessible and usable directly for communities, and that it supports a more comprehensive understanding of risk, including both physical hazards and social vulnerabilities.

Recognizing that jurisdictional inconsistencies pose a challenge to widespread improvement, the federal government can support existing efforts to collect or contribute data and research to ensure consistent and accurate integration of provincial/territorial datasets.

What information would make your community better prepared to respond to emergencies?

Local governments will benefit from access to clear, consistent, and locally relevant information about climate change impacts and natural hazards. Planners have identified that critical data must be available and accessible to a wide range of practitioners across diverse local planning contexts.

There is a need for standardized data, as well as centralized, user-friendly repositories of case studies, tools, and scalable solutions. These resources can help practitioners, including land use planners, incorporate hazard and risk information more effectively in their practice.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on PSC's engagement on strengthening federal leadership in emergency management. Planners play a critical role in translating high-level climate and resilience objectives into on-the-ground implementation through land-use decisions, infrastructure planning, and community engagement.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with the federal government moving forward and to further explore collaborative resilience measures across the disciplines of emergency management and land use planning. We invite the federal government to join us in exploring new initiatives that will support knowledge-sharing and practitioner capacity – such as an AI-enabled repository of local government plans, codes and by-laws, and an external planning advisory service and youth corps to provide more cost-efficient planning support to under-resourced communities. CIP stands ready to contribute to collaborative approaches to resilience and emergency management.

Please contact Rebecca Judd, Manager, Policy and Government Relations (engage@cip-icu.ca) at the Canadian Institute of Planners, to connect further.

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