



How climate change and extreme weather are affecting employee health and productivity

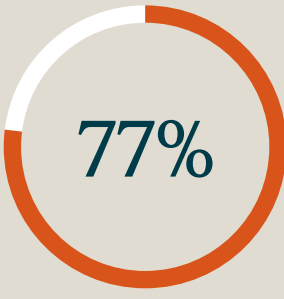
One of the most significant effects of climate change and extreme weather events is on human health.¹ The effects are many. They include physical health issues such as respiratory and cardiovascular problems due to poor air quality. They also include mental health effects related to extreme weather events, displacement, and climate anxiety.²

Workplaces risk bearing significant costs. Effects can include lower productivity and additional expenses related to disability and health benefits. Despite these risks, climate-related health impacts have not garnered attention among Canadian employers or group benefits carriers.

We surveyed Canadian employees to learn more about how climate change and extreme weather events may be impacting their health and productivity at work.

What employees told us

Health impacts are happening now



- 77% said they had personally experienced an extreme weather event in the last 3 years.



- 59% said their physical health had been affected by climate change and extreme weather.



- 54% said their mental health had been affected.

Employees with chronic conditions are 2X more likely than other employees to report their health has been affected.

Health impacts are affecting productivity at work



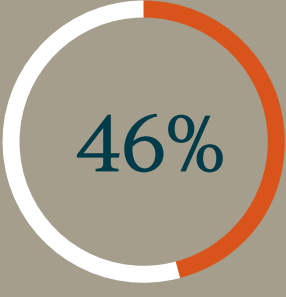
- 60% of employees experiencing a mental health issue said it had affected their work.



- 54% of employees experiencing a physical health issue said it had affected their work.

Work impacts reported by employees include taking time off, and feeling less productive and engaged while at work.

Many are not aware of how group benefits plans can help



- 46% agree their group benefits plans could support them with climate-related health challenges.



- 56% agree Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) could support them.

Gen Z employees are more likely than older employees to be aware of how their employee benefits could support them.

Supporting your employees

As climate change continues to affect employee health and workplace productivity, employers have a great opportunity to leverage their group benefits plans to support their employees.

Here are steps organizations can implement to enhance the resilience of their workforces and address the evolving health needs of their employees.



Enhance communication

- Inform employees about how group benefits plans can support their health in the face of climate change and extreme weather events. Existing supports for mental health and chronic disease are ideally suited to help.



Evaluate plan adequacy

- Assess whether current plans provide sufficient support, particularly for higher-risk groups such as those living with chronic disease and mental health challenges.



Ensure access during emergencies

- Develop strategies to maintain employee access to health care during climate-related emergencies.



Strengthen mental health support

- Explore additional programs to bolster employee mental health and resilience in response to climate-related challenges.

About our research

We wanted to gain a greater understanding of climate-related effects on Canadian employees today. In December 2024, we partnered with Environics Research to conduct a national survey of 2,000 Canadian employees. This research provided us with insights into the impact of climate change on health and work from their perspective. It also helped us identify the potential supports that group benefits plans could provide to help mitigate these impacts.

Questions?

For more information, please contact your Sun Life Group Benefits representative.

This infographic provides you with general information only. It doesn't provide you with employment, legal, health or financial advice. Consult with an appropriate professional to meet your organization's needs.

¹ World Health Organization, 2023. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-11-2023-climate-change-and-noncommunicable-diseases-connections>
² Canadian Climate Institute, [The Health Costs of Climate Change, 2021](#).

