



**Mental Health
in the Anthropocene:
Climate Anxiety
among Québec's
English-Speaking
Youth**



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A special thank you to **Nessa Ghassemi-Bakhtiari, B.Env.**, for her edits and contributions to this policy brief.

Date published

March 2023

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CONTEXT: WHAT IS CLIMATE ANXIETY?

As a result of ongoing climate change and disruptions, feelings of climate anxiety have increased in saliency amongst youth globally (Hickman, Caroline, et al. 2021). Climate anxiety, according to *The Handbook of Climate Psychology*, refers to a “heightened emotional, mental or somatic distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system” (Dodds 2021).

Our province is as likely as any region to start observing such responses. Since the 1950s, average temperatures in Québec have increased by 1 to 3 °C. Such dramatic changes threaten agricultural production, marine ecosystems, coastal infrastructure and human wellbeing (Bush & Lemmen 438). The impacts of these ecological transformations will affect all of us, and might be hardest felt by communities who “rely most closely on the land and land-based activities for their livelihood and wellbeing” (Hickman, Caroline, et al. 261). In Québec, this primarily refers to Indigenous nations, farmers, and residents living particularly near the Gulf of the St. Lawrence. That said, it is not necessary to have directly experienced the consequences of climate change to experience climate anxiety (Field, Galway 2023).

WHY ADDRESS IT NOW?

Feelings of climate anxiety “have been linked to a wide variety of acute and chronic mental health experiences” (Cunsolo & Ellis 275). Psychosocial responses to climate change may include, but are not limited to, “depression, anxiety, and pre- and post-traumatic stress; increased drug and alcohol usage; increased suicide ideation, attempts at and death by suicide; threats and disruptions to sense of place and place attachment; and loss of personal or cultural identity and ways of knowing” (275).

According to climate expert Ashlee Cunsolo, this alarming array of responses will only worsen “as extreme weather events intensify” (Issa 2021). To address the “acute” increase in climate anxiety, communities require the development and dissemination of resources “to support health professionals, including toolkits, workshops, train-the-trainers approaches, communities of practice, and web-based teaching techniques” (Hickman, Caroline, et al. 262).

Québec’s English-speaking youth are already faced with a tenuous mental health landscape. In a 2021 survey conducted by the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) sampling 456 members of the community, 90% of these respondents indicated “[struggling] at least somewhat often with their mental health and well-being” (CHSSN 3). The gaps in available mental health services for linguistic minority communities are also proven to be a significant barrier to care, as 46% of the survey respondents reported feeling uncomfortable speaking French and not feeling understood when talking about their mental health (CHSSN 11). As climate-related incidents continue to proliferate, so too will the demand for climate-conscious mental health care. Without the appropriate access to such care, Québec’s English-speaking youth community are at an increased risk of mental health struggles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Y4Y Québec urges the provincial government to raise awareness on the existence and urgency of climate anxiety. In doing so, we hope this starts a conversation around policymaking at the intersection of mental health and climate change.

Our research finds two Québec-based organisations who have begun addressing climate anxiety. First, Éco-motion is a Sherbrooke-based collective that, since 2020, aims to accompany individuals and organisations in their psychosocial adaptation to our changing world by channelling peoples' climate anxiety into meaningful social actions and improving their mental wellbeing ("[Éco-Motion](#)"). Second, Clinique aventurine in Québec City has one psychologist who practises eco-psychotherapy and takes in clients who experience stress or anxiety in relation to climate anxiety ("[Psychothérapie Pour Écoanxiété: Clinique Aventurine: Québec](#)").

Though some members of the Éco-Motion collective are bilingual, neither of these organisations currently offer their services in English. Y4Y encourages organisations currently serving Québec's English-speaking population to seek climate-specific funding from the provincial and federal governments to expand our knowledge of the impacts of climate anxiety, and create programming that addresses them. This would allow nonprofits from the English-speaking community to offer climate anxiety workshops similar in nature to the approach adopted by Éco-motion. Over the next year, Y4Y will be researching climate anxiety among Québec's English-speaking youth, and appealing to policymakers based on our findings.

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