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WU 5119

FRAMING QUEER RESILIENCE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE:

Exploring Approaches to 2SLGBTQI+ Resilience to
Climate Change and Other Shocks and Stresses

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



We acknowledge that the work in this report was done in both Tkaronto and Ottawa, which encompass the traditional territories of many First Peoples. Toronto is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and Ottawa is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

Tkaronto is covered under Treaty #13 and the Williams Treaties. Both Tkaronto and Ottawa are part of 'the Dish with One Spoon' wampum, a Treaty made between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and the Haudenosaunee, where nations entered into an agreement to protect the land and responsibly care for its resources in harmony together.

As settlers, newcomers, refugees, and Indigenous peoples, we have all been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect. We are also mindful of broken treaties that persist across Turtle Island today and recognize our

responsibilities as Treaty people to engage in a meaningful, continuous process of truth and reconciliation with all our relations.

By being on this land, we are all responsible for upholding its treaties. Treaty agreements were made to last as long as "the sun shines, the grass grows, and rivers flow."

Policies must recognize Indigenous people's place as the ones best positioned to care for their land. Data shows that forests managed by Indigenous peoples have fewer fires, and higher levels of biodiversity than state-managed forests. We are dedicated to ensuring that as we take up this work we walk alongside those who have been stewarding this land since time immemorial.

We invite you to learn about the Indigenous Nations that care for the land you are on, and where you might come from, visit native-land.ca to learn more.

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PURPOSE STATEMENT



In this preliminary report, we make the case for 2SLGBTQI+ and allied organizations, policymakers, and funders to invest in building resilience and advancing justice for 2SLGBTQI+ communities in the face of climate change and other future shocks and stresses. We hope this framing report can help spur conversations, offer inspiration, and break down silos across movements and sectors.

We outline what we've learned so far about how climate change — from extreme weather to increased risk of future pandemics — disproportionately impacts 2SLGBTQI+ communities, and some ways 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities are working to build community resilience and advance justice. The 519 offers this report as a starting point for our own work and for communities across Canada and beyond.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities across Canada and the world face growing impacts from the climate emergency. Climate change is a force-multiplier for long-standing inequalities. Without bold action across societies, cascading climate shocks and stresses will threaten hard-won progress and push marginalized communities further to the margins. This report is a call for 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities to build community resilience and demand justice in a changing world. It is based on preliminary conversation with local partners, peers, and experts across North America, and preliminary research on climate impacts and resilience work happening around the world.

We provisionally define “resilience” as building strong, well-resourced, and just communities that can thrive amidst rapid change. The greatest risks in a changing climate come not from extreme weather but from isolation, disempowerment, and the choices of institutions and policymakers to maintain deep inequalities that make people's lives precarious. Marginalized communities have long built joyful communities and networks of care amid crises, while insisting no one be left to fend for themselves. Amid climate, pandemic, and other shocks and stresses, building community resilience is more vital than ever.

Climate change is driving extreme heat, wildfires, smoke, rain, storms, floods, and other impacts across Canada. This increasingly disrupts our daily lives and threatens our health, homes, safety, and well-being. 2SLGBTQI+ communities face greater risks of illness, injury, trauma, economic loss, and displacement from climate, pandemic, and other shocks and stresses. These risks are rooted in existing inequalities, including:

- Disparities in chronic health conditions, mental health, mobility, and reliance on some medications.
- Higher rates of poverty, isolation, living alone, being un- or under-housed, or in institutional settings.
- Barriers and discrimination in accessing supports before, during, and after emergencies.

Climate change could also contribute to more people than ever before relocating both within and to Canada. This will present challenges and opportunities for 2SLGBTQI+ communities, and may call for new collaborations across geographies. Other climate impacts are harder to predict but will have major implications for 2SLGBTQI+ communities, including increased risks of infectious diseases, future pandemics, and disruptions to jobs, housing markets, transportation, and supply chains.

Though countless 2SLGBTQI+ individuals are playing crucial roles as climate activists, 2SLGBTQI+ communities have been largely invisible in climate, disaster, and resilience efforts. We have often relied on ad hoc efforts and informal networks to help each other in emergencies. This is changing as 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized community groups worldwide emerge as grassroots emergency managers, community planners, and resilience hubs. While 2SLGBTQI+ resilience efforts are still evolving, we identify a few key themes for communities and organizations to consider:

1. Asset-Mapping and Collaboration.
2. Community Knowledge and Leadership.
3. Advocating for Climate Justice and Community Investment.
4. Cultivating Connected, Resilient Communities.
5. All-Hazards Community Preparedness.
6. Organizational Resilience.

The 519 is just beginning this work, learning from partners and peers how to integrate a resilience lens in everything we do. This work calls for us to listen, support community leadership, forge new relationships, and redefine what we mean by “2SLGBTQI+ issues.” “Resilience work” is an essential extension of the work 2SLGBTQI+ people have always done to survive and thrive together. We have always met crises with love, care, and demanding justice — and that is what a changing world demands today.



1. INTRODUCTION: THE URGENCY OF QUEER RESILIENCE



Today, Canada and the world — and especially 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities — are facing a growing, generational climate emergency. The many, complex effects of climate change are already acting as a force multiplier for long-standing inequalities, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future unless bold action is taken by every part of society. Marginalized communities across Canada and the world will be pushed further to the margins by cascading climate events and related social and economic disruptions.

Throughout this report, we will refer to “community resilience” and “climate adaptation.” We define these concepts in relation to The 519’s strategic principles of Justice, Adaptation, Confronting Anti-Black Racism and Indigenous Reconciliation, Well-Being, and Sustainability.¹

- **“Resilience”** refers to the capacity of communities and organizations to sustain themselves through, recover from, and learn and grow stronger from disruptive events. 2SLGBTQI+ communities in many ways have been defined by resilience — by finding ways to sustain life, community, and joy while resisting injustice. We define resilience broadly, and in the context of justice. While we can learn from how communities have often coped in crises with minimal resources, we deserve and can achieve better. Toronto activists and scholars, writing about local responses to COVID-19, have warned that defining resilience too narrowly risks offloading responsibility from powerful institutions onto marginalized community members themselves.² We provisionally define resilience not merely as survival, “grit,” or emergency preparedness but as building

strong, well-resourced, and just communities that thrive amid rapid change. Resilience in the face of climate change requires social change and social justice. We expect to refine this definition over time.

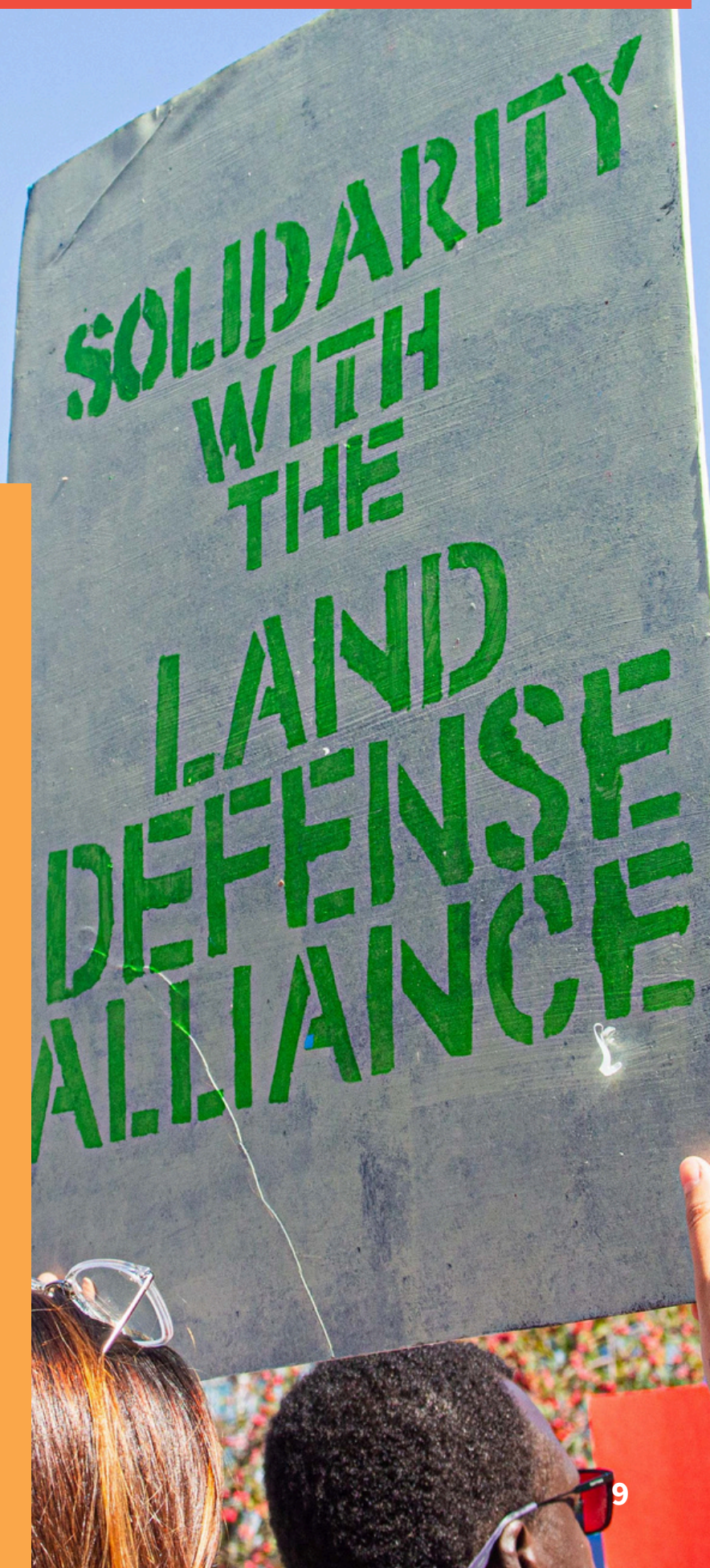
- **“Shocks”** and **“stresses”** can include many kinds of sudden disruptions or chronic pressures on communities that call for resilience. Shocks may include a fire, flood, new pandemic, economic crash, or a policy shift that upends lives overnight. Stresses include slowly accumulating pressures from rising average temperatures, strained food and housing systems, or ongoing socio-political backlash. Climate, economic, and political pressures can have compounding cascading effects, demanding creative and “multisolving” responses.³
- **“Climate adaptation”** means taking action to minimize harms from the evolving impacts of climate change and maximize well-being. This can mean changes in how and where we live, work, eat, build community, and support each other, to be less vulnerable to extreme weather and events. Too often, “adaptation” has been defined only in terms of individual preparedness and technical fixes, and has been too focused on protecting property values, “the economy,” or the status quo. **We believe adaptation should not mean sustaining an unjust status quo, but should start with recognizing that the status quo is unsustainable.** Adaptation must include institutions adapting, and supporting communities to adapt, to communities’ own changing needs as they define them.

- **“Climate justice”** means addressing the unequal impacts of climate change by focusing on the multiple structural inequalities that drive them, and advancing just and equitable solutions.⁴ Climate justice thus necessarily includes racial justice, Indigenous justice, disability justice, gender justice, and 2SLGBTQI+ justice, and includes addressing underlying inequalities in housing, health care, food, education, employment, and other systems that expose marginalized communities to disproportionate climate risks and other precarities.
- **“Vulnerability”** and being **“at greater risk”** from climate change is largely a function of inequality and being pushed to the margins. 2SLGBTQI+ and other populations are more vulnerable to climate change, not inherently, but because society has tended to leave us more exposed to harm, with fewer resources to adapt.⁵ This means a community can be very resilient in some ways, highly vulnerable in others, and face structural barriers to greater resilience.

Ending carbon emissions is equally vital to the well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ people and all marginalized communities. While not the focus of this report, just how extreme and rapid climate change will be, depends on how quickly we can make deep, systemic changes in our unjust, carbon-driven economies and create sustainable, zero-carbon communities. 2SLGBTQI+ communities can and must advance and insist on strategies that both advance resilience and reduce emissions.



As always, a better world is possible. 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized people in Canada and globally have mobilized to protect each other amid pandemics, repression, and other crises. Our communities have deep wells of resolve and creativity, or joyful determination to exist. We have used them both to build networks of care, and to insist that being left to fend for ourselves in an unequal society is unacceptable. In a rapidly changing climate, it is more vital than ever that we come together with one another and our neighbours to build more just, resilient communities where we all can thrive.



2. WHAT CLIMATE CHANGE MEANS FOR 2SLGBTQI+ COMMUNITIES



Extreme weather and other climate impacts will mean new and intensified risks for 2LGBTQI+ people's health, safety, and well-being.

A rapidly changing climate is changing the ways we live across Canada in numerous ways and will do so for decades to come.⁶ While impacts will differ across Canada, some of the key climate shocks and stresses already occurring include:



Dangerously hot days that are hotter, more frequent, and more unpredictable than in the past, threatening our health, power grids, food systems. Canada's temperatures are warming especially fast. Climate change contributes to the formation of especially deadly "heat domes" that trap hot, humid air over a larger region for an extended period — such as 2021 heat dome that led to over 600 deaths in British Columbia.



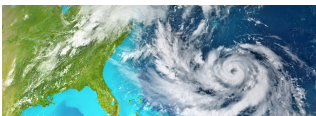
Extreme rainfall, storms, and flooding are more intense and unpredictable year-round, with impacts such as power outages, damage to homes, roads, and buildings, and exposure to mould and contaminated water.



More frequent, intense, and longer wildfires across Canada, and unhealthier air quality from far-reaching wildfire smoke, as well as longer and more intense allergy seasons. Health Canada estimates this smoke already contributes to hundreds, perhaps thousands of premature deaths each year, even in places hundreds of miles away from wildfires.⁷



Cold weather will continue to pose hazards. Overall, extreme cold days are becoming less frequent and intense, and cold-related deaths are expected to decline. Cold still causes more deaths than heat, and most occur in above-freezing temperatures.⁸ More sudden cold snaps and storm damage will mean continuing risks amid unpredictable winters.



Rising sea levels from coast to coast to coast, together with increasing threats from Atlantic and Pacific storms, and an array of risk and disruptions from loss of ice and permafrost in Northern Canada.

Scientists and governments now warn that these trends result in growing dangers to human health and personal safety; increasingly disrupt daily routines, transportation, and supply chains for food and consumer goods; and potentially erode household incomes and exacerbate housing crises across Canada and the world — with 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities especially impacted.⁹

Climate impacts in the GTA

Toronto's greatest direct, near-term climate risks come from intensifying and unpredictable heat, extreme highs and lows in precipitation and lake levels that could lead to flooding, and wildfire smoke.¹⁰ For example:

- Toronto had an average of about 12 days per year over 30°C from 1976-2005. That average ticked up to about 20 days per year in 2016-2023, and it's forecast to grow to between 30-48 days in the next 25 years.¹¹ Premature deaths attributable to heat, estimated at around 120 per year for prior decades, could grow dramatically.¹²
- Toronto was ranked in the ten most affected Canadian communities by wildfire smoke in the 2010s despite its distance (so far) from major fires.¹³ The City announced its first wildfire smoke strategy "in response to the unprecedented deterioration in air quality in Toronto in 2023 caused by distant wildfires burning in other regions of Canada."¹⁴
- Toronto will experience more frequent extreme rainfall and flooding year-round. Deluges like those in July 2013 and 2024 — with 100mm or more of rain in a few hours, cutting power to over 150,000, flooding many homes and businesses, washing out roads and disrupting school, transit, and essential services, with lingering health risks from mould and contaminated water — will be more common.

These risks are substantial, but could appear less severe in comparison to many other parts of Canada. Toronto and other Great Lakes communities, sometimes (perhaps misleadingly) called relative "climate havens," may have opportunities to model just adaptation and resilience. Our region will also likely attract increasing numbers of new residents from around Canada, the US, and the world.

The greatest risks in a changing climate come not from extreme weather but from the choices of our institutions and policymakers to maintain deep inequalities in access to health, housing, mobility, food, and public participation. Like other marginalized groups in society, 2SLGBTQI+ people in Canada and around the world face “structural inequalities that may exacerbate the effects of climate change.”¹⁵ For example, 2SLGBTQI+ people are at increased risk due to disproportionate homelessness, chronic illness, disability, incarceration, and discrimination. This translates into greater risks when climate, pandemic, or other disasters occur and in their aftermaths.¹⁶ This is especially so for multiply-marginalized 2SLGBTQI+ people, including those who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, newcomers, disabled, older adults, unhoused, sex workers, or drug users.¹⁷

Around the world, 2SLGBTQI+ communities report that climate, pandemic, and other emergency events have often “decimated the already limited physical spaces, social networks and support services available to them,” whether through the physical destruction of floods, fires, storms, or earthquakes, or the disruptions of a pandemic.¹⁸ While there are still many gaps in our knowledge, here is some of what we already know about how 2SLGBTQI+ people are being and will be affected.

Climate change could compound existing 2SLGBTQI+ health disparities.

2SLGBTQI+ populations experience multiple health disparities, “driven by social forces, such as stigma, prejudice, and discrimination,” that can increase their precarity in a changing world.¹⁹ These are just some of the documented health disparities that can be exacerbated by climate, pandemic, and other shocks and stresses:



Mental health. 2SLGBTQI+ populations experience disparities in mental health, especially in anxiety and depression.²⁰ Individuals with serious mental illness are less likely to be prepared for a disaster, and experience exacerbated health harms following disasters.²¹ Both immediate climate shocks and stresses, and grief and anxiety over continuing climate impacts, can erode mental health; researchers note particular concern for youth and for Indigenous populations, and stress the protective potential of climate education, action, and community.²²



Mobility impairments. 2SLGBTQI+ people are more likely to have mobility impairments and other physical disabilities.²³ Structural and other ableist barriers routinely endanger people with these impairments by making it more difficult to seek help or evacuate.



Respiratory, cardiovascular, and other chronic health conditions: Some 2SLGBTQI+ populations have higher levels of smoking, asthma, and risks of cardiovascular disease.²⁴ Pre-existing respiratory conditions put individuals at greater risk from heat waves, wildfires, and smoke exposures, as well as storms and floods that can lead to mould and other environmental exposures. There is also evidence that 2SLGBTQI+ people have higher rates of some other chronic conditions, such as epilepsy,²⁵ which can also be exacerbated by climate events.²⁶



HIV: HIV continues to disproportionately affect 2SLGBTQI+ populations.²⁷ Like other chronic conditions, HIV care can be interrupted during disasters, and HIV medication access is seldom accounted for in disaster planning and response efforts.²⁸ By disrupting people's lives, care, public health and prevention efforts, climate events may also expose communities to higher risks for HIV and STI transmission.²⁹



Medications, binding, and extreme heat and smoke: 2SLGBTQI+ people may be more likely to rely on any of a range of medications that could increase risks of heat illness, including certain antidepressants and other mental health medications, or diuretics like the antiandrogen spironolactone.³⁰ Trans people who rely on chest binders or restrictive shapewear could, absent adequate precautions, also face increased risks from extreme heat or smoke.³¹

Climate change increases the dangers of social isolation, living alone, and living in institutional settings for 2SLGBTQI+ people.

Living alone, and being socially isolated, both create additional risks for one's physical and mental health during climate, pandemic, and other shocks. Studies have found that older 2SLGBTQI+ adults are more likely to live alone and experience social isolation and loneliness.³² 2SLGBTQI+ people who are older, disabled, have chronic health conditions, or are simply socially isolated are at the greatest risk of being seriously harmed by heat, mould, and other climate hazards in their homes.

2SLGBTQI+ people are also more likely to live in institutional settings, — ranging from prisons and detention to shelters, group homes, and long-term care — where they are more reliant on others for their safety. These settings are often under-staffed, neglected in emergency planning, and populated by marginalized and stigmatized people, creating markedly increased risk in climate, pandemic, and other events.³³

Climate change could exacerbate housing crises and heighten dangers for unhoused and under-housed 2SLGBTQI+ people.

2SLGBTQI+ youth and adults are more likely to be unhoused — exposing them to some of the most serious dangers from climate, pandemic, and other extreme events.³⁴ For example, from 2012-2018 people in Ontario who were considered “at risk of homelessness” were ten times more likely to have a heat-related ER visit.³⁵ Yet climate and emergency planning seldom adequately consider unhoused people, and shelters typically lack the adequate surge capacity or physical resilience for extreme weather.³⁶ Low-income renters, who disproportionately include 2SLGBTQI+ people, are also especially at risk from climate impacts. They are more likely to live in older, substandard housing — for example, in older residential towers or basement apartments — that is especially vulnerable to extreme rains and flooding, power outages, or unsafe temperatures.³⁷

Recent research suggests 2SLGBTQI+ people may also be at greater risk of displacement and related harms when disasters occur. An analysis of 2022-2023 data from the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey found that, compared to their straight, cisgender counterparts, trans and queer people were nearly twice as likely to be displaced from their homes when experiencing a disaster, and faced worse displacement conditions, including higher rates of permanent displacement, with the worst disparities for trans and queer people of colour.³⁸

To protect homes and their residents, some communities are pursuing policy solutions including new standards for climate-resilient buildings, and mandating and subsidizing retrofits of existing homes to make them both safer and greener, and mandating safe temperatures and other tenant protections for rental units.³⁹ These are critical steps to protect 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities — but they must also be backed up with investments in ensuring new housing is affordable, and retrofits are not exploited to hike rents or displace low-income people. Similarly, new policies and investments are needed to protect homes, neighbourhoods, and residents’ health with more green spaces and green infrastructure — but they must be guided by the needs and voices of marginalized communities, not simply seen as “amenities” that could fuel gentrification.⁴⁰

The housing and climate crises in Canadian cities are tied, and 2SLGBTQI+ advocacy should reflect this. Extreme weather is making older buildings and building methods unsustainable and unsafe, and damaging a growing number of homes. Today’s broken housing markets are not on track to provide the improved, expanded housing supply needed by growing cities. With major, generational investments in more safe, affordable, and climate-resilient housing, both crises could be ameliorated; with neglect, they could exacerbate each other.⁴¹



Climate risks are exacerbated by discrimination and distrust, and climate events can be flashpoints for stigma and backlash.

These risks may be exacerbated by bias, discrimination, lack of competence in emergency response and other social safety net systems, and by distrust in both government and traditional private aid agencies. Ample research from around North America and the world also documents how 2SLGBTQI+ people face stigma, discrimination, and incompetent or inadequate responses in disasters.⁴² This leads to delays and barriers in accessing shelter, food, medical care, or financial help in situations ‘that are necessarily time-sensitive, and to people being unable to access help at all. These barriers are exacerbated for multiply-marginalized 2SLGBTQI+ people, who may face additional barriers due to racism, language and access needs, immigrant status.

Critically, past experiences of discrimination and a lack of trust in government, religiously-affiliated and other private aid agencies, can also lead 2SLGBTQI+ people to delay seeking help at critical moments.⁴³ 2SLGBTQI+ people’s willingness to seek help in a crisis is often coloured by negative experiences seeking help in non-disaster situations, whether with health care, food aid, shelter, or other social services.⁴⁴ Newcomers and other multiply-marginalized 2SLGBTQI+ people often face additional barriers to help.⁴⁵ Faith-based organizations from all faith traditions play important roles in disaster preparedness and response work, including faith-based organizations that largely or primarily minister to, or are otherwise deeply committed to serving, 2SLGBTQI+ people.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, across Canada and the world, 2SLGBTQI+ people’s negative past experiences with religious institutions can lead to particular distrust of faith-based aid groups.⁴⁷ Concerted work, including

partnerships with queer and queer-inclusive faith groups, are needed to overcome these barriers.

There is also a long, worldwide, and continuing history of prejudices being inflamed and marginalized people being scapegoated in the wake of climate events.⁴⁸ “LGBTQ+ communities have often been blamed for disasters and public health crises,” including by hostile political and religious leaders.⁴⁹ This can aggravate the mental health impacts of disasters, reinforce a reluctance to seek help, and even contribute to harassment and violence.⁵⁰ While it may be tempting to view such scapegoating as relegated to the past or to other countries, we cannot ignore the risk that escalating climate shocks and stresses could be manipulated to fuel the hostility, violence, and political backlash against 2SLGBTQI+, newcomer, and other marginalized communities that Canada already faces today. Here, too, climate-driven and sociopolitical shocks may be intertwined, and 2SLGBTQI+ advocacy and resilience work must account for both.



Climate effects could lead many people, including 2SLGBTQI+ people, to move within and to Canada, presenting opportunities and challenges.

Climate change could make it harder to live, and farm, in many parts of the world, including parts of the Southern and Western United States, and some places in Canada.⁵¹ Rising challenges like heat or drought, sudden events like wildfires, and forecasts of future risks could contribute to more people than ever before relocating within Canada, and others moving to Canada from the US and around the world.⁵² New residents will create opportunities for Canadian communities (especially growing cities) to strengthen an aging workforce, prioritize long-needed community investments, and strengthen their commitments to inclusion and human rights — or to exacerbate inequalities and scapegoat new residents.

In recent years, 2SLGBTQI+ communities across Canada have already worked hard to welcome and integrate newcomers. For example, The 519 saw a six-fold increase in LGBTQI+ refugees seeking assistance from 2022 to 2023. Globally, Rainbow Railroad saw a nearly five-fold increase in LGBTQI+ refugees seeking assistance from 2020 to 2023.⁵³ In addition to continued efforts to support and advocate for LGBTQI+ newcomers from abroad, 2SLGBTQI+ communities in Canada may need to consider how best to support those relocating domestically, including ways to help preserve 2SLGBTQI+ community networks and heritage, support 2SLGBTQI+ Indigenous people who may be newly displaced from traditional lands, and help new residents settle and integrate.⁵⁴ This may present new opportunities for 2SLGBTQI+ communities in different parts of Canada, and throughout North America, to work together.



Climate change increases risks of food and income security.

2SLGBTQI+ people are more likely to experience food insecurity, with greater disparities among racialized, trans, and bisexual people. The COVID-19 pandemic caused or worsened food insecurity for many, including by disrupting incomes, supply chains, and prices and making it harder to access grocery stores and food aid.⁵⁵ While the full impacts in different parts of Canada are complex and difficult to predict, climate shocks and stresses are already causing numerous disruptions to people's jobs and income, and to food production, storage, and transportation. Experts say investing in economic security and food justice, including urban food production, are critical to protecting marginalized communities from climate impacts.⁵⁶



Climate change increases risks of infectious disease and future pandemics.

Climate change is already contributing to the introduction and spread of infectious diseases in Canada, for example with Lyme disease and West Nile virus.⁵⁷ It also increases the risk of future pandemics, making it critical to build on lessons learned from HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, SARS, COVID-19, and Mpox. 2SLGBTQI+ people have been disparately affected by COVID due to existing inequalities, from barriers to health care to being more likely to work in some of the hardest-hit industries.⁵⁸



Toronto responds to COVID-19

Across Toronto, grassroots leaders and community groups responded to COVID-19's arrival by leveraging existing relationships and personal networks to rapidly understand and help people meet their basic needs. Government responses were often slow, uncoordinated, and failed to account for acute impacts on marginalized communities.

Under-resourced organizations and often unpaid community advocates thus served as critical backbones: as conduits of information for both officials and neighbours, filling gaps in formal systems, and able to get resources where they were needed most, while also pressing policymakers to do more. The pandemic showed that “rapid mobilization and response to major shocks is not possible without the involvement of community hubs.”⁵⁹ These critical actors did the best they could, but were not brought to the table for planning and policy decisions, or funded adequately (or at all) for their essential work.⁶⁰

Service organizations of all kinds did extraordinary, creative work to maintain, adapt, and expand critical supports; for example, by moving programs online while providing residents with the necessary devices and internet access, and making everything from meals and meal kits to toiletries, medical and harm-reduction supplies, and bike repair kits available for pickup or delivery, and organizing and supporting mutual aid networks and neighbourhood “pods.” Yet these groups struggled to meet heightened needs with inadequate staff, space, supplies, and funding; staff facing secondary trauma and burnout; poor communication with and from officials and funders; and funding models that never accounted for emergency planning, cross-sector coordination, or rapid adaptation.⁶¹

Beginning immediately upon the imposition of public health measures in March 2020, The 519 immediately transformed our operations and mobilized to serve tens of thousands of daily takeaway meals over the ensuing months, distribute essential supplies, and roll out a virtual community check-in program, while moving other regular services quickly to an over-the-phone basis, and continuing other on-the-ground outreach and housing navigation work. As a trusted messenger, The 519 worked quickly and continuously to disseminate critical COVID-19 health and other information and resources. The 519 staff worked hard to coordinate and combine efforts with other partners, such as by joining forces on the logistics of rapidly expanding meal deliveries.



Recognizing continued community needs while many other spaces and services remained shuttered, The 519 reopened its doors in July 2020 for modified on-site services while maintaining virtual programming and phone-based services. The 519 continued to play a critical role throughout the pandemic, helping to deliver over 7,000 vaccine doses in 2021 as the lead agency for Toronto's Downtown East Vaccine Engagement team. Recognizing the urgent need to supplement grassroots mutual aid efforts, The 519 launched the Pay It No Mind Fund to provide low-barrier emergency financial support to racialized 2 Spirit, trans, and non-binary people. In 2022, The 519 helped to deliver a combined 3,300 doses of COVID-19, flu, and Mpox vaccines.⁶²

Toronto's COVID-19 experiences demonstrate the dedication, creativity, and power of grassroots communities, as well as community-engaged organizations like The 519. But just as importantly, it underscores the need for much greater investments in the “social infrastructure” of communities, and the need for community voices at the table.⁶³ It also made starker than ever how much precarity and inequality is built into our city and society, and the need for equitable investments to “shockproof” our communities.⁶⁴



3. 2SLGBTQI+ COMMUNITIES MUST BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND DEMAND CLIMATE JUSTICE.



2SLGBTQI+ communities are critical partners in resilience and emergency planning, but are rarely included in or resourced for this work.

Around the world, “LGBTI groups are among those who are often most affected by the impacts of climate change but who are also often invisible in relief and resilience efforts.”⁶⁵ Several Canadian government reports and strategies have recognized that 2SLGBTQI+ people are disproportionately affected by climate, pandemic, and disaster events.⁶⁶ A 2023 Public Health Canada report called for incorporating equity, health needs, and community knowledge of 2SLGBTQI+ people in planning and responding to these disruptive events.⁶⁷ Despite these statements, 2SLGBTQI+ people and communities are typically not considered — meaningfully, or often at all — in climate adaptation or disaster planning, funding, policies, programs, or outreach. Nascent philanthropic efforts are emerging to fund 2SLGBTQI+ climate work.⁶⁸

From HIV/AIDS to COVID-19, and from hurricanes to wildfires, 2SLGBTQI+ people have worked to help and protect one another, and to demand just responses. Often, this has meant loose networks of friends and chosen family acting with fierce love but few resources, and 2SLGBTQI+ NGOs scrambling to support grassroots relief funds and mutual aid networks.

Here are just some of the ways 2SLGBTQI+ organizations across Canada and the United States have responded to climate events and other disasters in their communities:

- Opening 2SLGBTQI+ community spaces as emergency shelters, cooling centers, charging centers, meeting points, and donation centers.⁶⁹
- Distributing critical supplies before and after climate events, from clothes, toiletries, and hair clippers, to “go bags” and first aid kits, to essentials for staying cool, warm, moving, or sleeping rough.⁷⁰
- Direct food aid, including hot meals and home deliveries.
- Animal rescue, transportation, and shelter coordination.⁷¹
- Collecting and distributing needed medications, such as HIV medications.⁷²
- Conducting pro-active neighbour check-ins, case-management calls, and street outreach.⁷³
- Organizing home cleanup, gutting, and repair teams.⁷⁴
- Service navigation, warm handoffs, and rides to traditional aid agencies.⁷⁵
- Low-barrier cash help for immediate needs; help with major costs such as moving, repairs, and even paying off flooded homes; and disaster-related paperwork and benefits navigation.⁷⁶
- Supporting community preparedness, connection, well-being before and after disasters through efforts such as preparedness guides, zines, and trauma-informed storytelling and arts events.⁷⁷
- Helping improve the responses of emergency services and traditional relief agencies by offering education, training, and technical assistance.⁷⁸



2SLGBTQI+ people and organizations have not only become ad-hoc first responders and emergency managers. 2SLGBTQI+ groups and advocates also frequently work for access and justice with regard to housing, health, food, and public spaces, and to strong communities that connect people and prevent isolation — all key issues for resilience in a changing world. Even as “climate issues” and “2SLGBTQI+ issues” remain siloed in most NGO spaces, 2SLGBTQI+ youth are also heavily represented as activists and leaders for climate justice in Canada and around the world.⁷⁹

Government resilience plans for Canada and Toronto

Recognizing the enormous social, economic, and health hazards posed by climate change, the Government of Canada in recent years has announced goals for net-zero emissions by 2050 and for investing in adaptation and resilient buildings, cities, and communities.⁸⁰ In Toronto, local leaders have promised “net zero” emissions by 2040 and resilience strategies that include community-led resilience planning; expanding access to green space, transit, and locally-grown food; a climate-proof power grid; and accelerating major retrofits and tenant protections for even the largest, oldest, most hazardous buildings, while expanding access to safe and affordable housing.⁸¹

To date, many advocates and analysts say public investments have fallen far short of what would be needed to meet these critical goals. It also remains to be seen to what extent city planners can shift from a model of neighbourhood “cluster” tables whose focus is often limiting to coordinating existing resources among service providers, to one in which resilience planning deeply engages grassroots leaders and community groups in driving policy and resource decisions.

In March 2023, The 519 made a submission to Public Safety Canada, citing the need for all levels of government to engage, partner with, and resource 2SLGBTQI+ community groups to ensure inclusive emergency planning and build community resilience. Locally, The 519 has joined other local partners in engaging city planners to ensure a planned building-standards bylaw increases residents’ safety while protecting their rights. The 519 has also joined a new Toronto Heat Safety Coalition calling for an adequate temperature bylaw, providing heat-pumps and other cooling supports to tenants, and stronger emergency responses for heat waves.⁸²

2SLGBTQI+ focused adaptation and resilience efforts are small and emerging, but can learn from and combine with other community-based efforts.

In talking with peer organizations and advocates and reviewing published literature, we found that many recognize the growing significance of climate, pandemic, and disaster impacts, and the importance of building resilience in 2SLGBTQI+ communities. Like many other marginalized communities, 2SLGBTQI+ organizations in Canada currently lack resources, expertise, and models for doing this work. Struggling to meet increasing needs amid anti-2SLGBTQI+ backlash and continuing COVID-19 impacts, many groups have lacked capacity to fully assess and implement lessons learned during the pandemic, or from ad-hoc responses to past climate events.

Yet building community resilience is in many ways an extension and a deepening of the longstanding work of 2SLGBTQI+ community groups, and promising efforts are emerging. 2SLGBTQI+ organizations and activists in Canada can learn from each other, from intersecting marginalized communities, and from counterparts around the world. Organizations may need to explore new collaborations and funding resources that cross sectors and silos. Below, we highlight some key themes and examples we've found so far that may inform this work.



4. EMERGING THEMES FOR BUILDING 2SLGBTQI+ RESILIENCE.

LGBTQI+ climate resilience in Pacific Island nations

Pacific Island nations like Fiji and Vanuatu face existential threats from rising sea levels and climate-fueled storms.

Groups like [DIVA for Equality FIJI](#) support women and LGBTQI people amid growing disruptions in housing, food, work, water, safety, as well as dislocation and gender-based violence driven by storms, flooding, and sea-level rise. Their work includes mutual aid infused with community-building that responds to climate shocks and stress. Recent programs have included:

- Training women and LGBTQI people as builders to build more resilient homes for their own communities.
- Agroecology projects to support sustaining farming and kitchen gardens for women and LGBTQI people.
- Developing a network of women, femme, and non-binary climate activists to press for just climate action.⁸³

VPride Vanuatu created Effective SOGIE Inclusion in Times of Disaster: A Guide for Humanitarian Agencies in Vanuatu and the Pacific in 2023. VPrude has also been an active participant in a national community-based disaster response initiative, and in national and regional climate action coalitions, demanding responses to rising sea levels and storms threatening Pacific Island nations and treating a lack of climate action as a violation of fundamental human rights.⁸⁴



Queer and trans responses to hurricanes in Louisiana and Texas, 2005-2024

Across the Gulf Coast of the US and Mexico and throughout the Caribbean, increasingly destructive, climate-fueled hurricanes have devastated 2SGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck Louisiana and Texas in 2005, countless 2SLGBTQI+ people, especially those who were poor and BIPOC, were displaced, many permanently. Many were unable to evacuate due to a lack of resources. Public and private aid programs were built to focus on the needs of heteronormative families and middle-class homeowners and largely inaccessible to renters, same-sex couples, and other chosen families. Many 2SLGBTQI+ people were also wary of traditional aid groups, especially as some religious and political leaders openly blamed queer people for the storm. While many found support from non-2SLGBTQI+ neighbours, others lacked this kind of social capital. Some were effectively outed when the destruction, and the need for shelter and cleanup, made their private lives public. Queer and trans sex workers faced increased financial pressure to compromise safety practices. Many relied heavily on informal friendship networks—sometimes over great distances—for critical information and help accessing food, shelter, and services wherever they could. Despite limited resources or experience, 2SLGBTQI+ institutions such as Metropolitan Community Churches did their best to help with cleanups, food, clothing, medications, and more. During these storms and Hurricane Ike in 2008, there were incidents of emergency services or aid groups separating queer family groups during evacuations; not stocking or helping people access HIV or hormone medications; of folks wearing soiled, wet clothes because they were only offered gender-incongruent ones. The Montrose Center negotiated safeguards with local shelters after incidents of harassment, violence, and arrests of queer and trans folks for being in the “wrong” shelter space.



Montrose Center

When Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017, marginalized communities were again exposed to disproportionate impacts, often with little formal support. In Houston's historic queer enclave of Montrose, queer bars stayed open despite shin-high flooding, serving as aid distribution and meeting points. The Montrose Center, overwhelmed with increased casework and mental health needs, added staff, raised US\$750K for relief, and ran services including a food pantry, proactive case-management calls, volunteer home cleanout teams, and paperwork and financial help for home, insurance, auto, and moving costs. Organización Latina de Trans en Texas (OLTT) quickly opened its doors as an emergency shelter, and gave out meals and cheques for US\$100-150, knowing undocumented folks would face greater needs and more barriers to aid. OLTT immediately saw a need for more resources to help folks access lawyers, health care, and ID changes. The T.R.U.T.H. Project held a performance art event as "a much-needed space to process the aftermath of the traumatic event," with a counselor available onsite. Post-Harvey, gentrification in the Montrose "drastically increased," with damaged or abandoned buildings rapidly replaced by new townhouses or stores, and rents rising steadily for years afterward. Many queer residents were forced or chose to leave a dramatically changed neighbourhood, scattering communities that had weathered years of seemingly constant crisis.

As the region has continued to face hurricane impacts as well as COVID-19 in 2020, 2021, and 2024, 2SLGBTQI+ communities continue working to build resilience and demand an end to official neglect and inequalities. Organizations like Imagine Water Works have built mutual aid networks and assistance funds, including a Trans Clippers Project to deliver hair clippers, and arts-and-education projects such as a Queer/Trans Guide to Storms, with contributions from artists who'd been through past storms. Save Our Sisters United began organizing Houston-area 2SLGBTQI+ groups to plan for unified responses to crises ranging from storms to killings and suicides.

In July 2024, Hurricane Beryl caused flooding, dozens of tornadoes, and power outages for millions, with some sites like the Montrose Center losing power for over a week, disrupting plans to serve as a resource hub. The Center ensured uninterrupted programming at its offsite Senior Living Center, with other staff fielding calls and emails, connecting people to help, posting a resource page, and activating reserve Recovery Funds it had built in advance (including one for staff). Upon reopening, the Center dedicated space for public internet use and held bilingual support groups and one for queer organization leaders.

Queer and trans responses to extreme heat and wildfires

On the US West Coast, 2SLGBTQI+ communities have faced increasing impacts from extreme heat, drought, wildfires, and smoke. In July 2024, many communities faced temperatures well over 40°C, with some exceeding 50°C. Wildfires have caused millions to evacuate in countless fires in recent years. Organizations like LGBTQ Connection have worked to connect displaced youth to help, educate shelter staff and collect donations. In some areas, grassroots groups and drag performers have networked community members to raise funds and offer food, clothes, and temporary lodging.⁸⁹ Queer communities have promoted safety messages during extreme heat, and served as official or unofficial cooling centres. Santa Rosa Trans Latinas organized as a network of trans farmworkers and others for mutual aid after the 2017 Tubbs Fire. But several years later, they are weary and under-resourced: “Neither my [coworkers] nor my trans group is prepared for another fire of the magnitude of the one that happened in 2017.”⁹⁰

RESILIENCE THEME: Asset-Mapping and Collaboration

2SLGBTQI+ people are, literally, everywhere. Even as we may disproportionately live in more climate-exposed regions and neighbourhoods, 2SLGBTQI+ people are not tightly concentrated but live in substantial numbers in every postal code. While The 519 is a neighbourhood hub in centred in Toronto’s Downtown East (including the historic, but rapidly changing, “gay village”) even more people who come to us from across the city and the province, or connect online. That’s why it’s always been critical for 2SLGBTQI+ organizations to connect and collaborate with partners who have roots across our neighbourhoods, towns, and intersecting populations.

This is a key consideration for the place-based strategies that have often proven most effective for climate resilience. Our immediate surroundings and closest neighbours play enormous roles in how we’re exposed to, protected from, and can respond to climate risks. During climate, pandemic, or other emergencies, we often can’t readily connect to people and places beyond our neighbourhood. 2SLGBTQI+ groups whose focus crosses many neighbourhoods or localities must make connections and find synergies, including with groups, networks, and leaders who:



- Are doing local and hyper-local resilience-building and mutual aid work (which might or may not currently include or consider 2SLGBTQI+ people).
- Are doing climate and resilience work, especially work rooted in Black, Indigenous, Newcomer, disability, aging, low-income, and other disproportionately climate-exposed communities.
- Are among the many 2SLGBTQI+-identified leaders in climate and resilience efforts.

This could include a wide variety of potential partners from community centres, schools, food growers, and community land trusts, to academic centers and researchers, to grassroots neighbourhood groups and mutual aid networks, to groups focused on outdoor or eco-education, green jobs, or disaster relief.

Steps 2SLGBTQI+ organizations might consider to build these collaborations include:



Understanding and mapping existing work, knowledge, and resources that exist for building resilience across the communities they serve. This may include work on building “social infrastructure,” food justice, mutual aid, heat-safe apartments and workplaces, or community-based emergency preparedness (whether or not groups are using the language or “climate” or “resilience”).



Understanding and mapping community needs, spaces, and risk exposures may include analyzing public or program data, or conducting qualitative or quantitative research to identify people, places, and spaces most exposed to or least resourced for climate or other risks — for example, where flood or heat risks are greatest in a city, or where unhoused folks congregate, or where many older adults or 2SLGBTQI+ newcomers are living in substandard housing.⁹¹



Joining or cultivating conversations with existing partners about preparing for climate shocks, service continuity in crises, cross-sector resilience and emergency planning.



Exploring shared resilience needs and opportunities across organizations focused on Black, Indigenous, Newcomer, disability, 2SLGBTQI+, and other communities.



Identifying shared advocacy priorities that support climate resilience for 2SLGBTQI+ and other communities.



Exploring ways to help 2SLGBTQI+ people connect and contribute to local or neighbourhood resilience efforts, resources, and safe spaces.



Considering what resources and expertise 2SLGBTQI+ organizations' already have that could position them to take a lead role in particular intersectional resilience efforts.

Collaborative capacity-building often takes dedicated resources and sustained efforts. Organizations may consider pursuing (and policymakers and funders should support) new funding streams that can support these efforts, for example through new or reimagined coalitions, convenings, joint research efforts, ongoing “communities of practice,” or other means.

RESILIENCE THEME: Community Knowledge and Leadership

In Toronto, in Canada, and around the world, effective resilience initiatives have been grounded in activating the knowledge, vitality, and leadership of 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized community members. Even communities that have not yet experienced a major, sudden, and obviously climate-linked shock (such as a wildfire or deadly heat dome), have felt the shocks of COVID-19, and often of other shocks that exacerbated everyday inequalities and called for community resilience.⁹²

The most successful efforts have resourced and supported the development of grassroots community leadership: matching community members' knowledge of their own needs and desire for robust networks of care, with staff support, technical

expertise, physical space, and other resources, complemented by formal programs and services that respond to community priorities. This can include convening neighbours to discuss their visions of resilience and share knowledge; supporting community-led initiatives with administrative, capacity-building and fund-raising support; acting as a liaison with officials; and providing a physical home and infrastructure for everyday activities as well as emergency needs.⁹³ Critically, 2SLGBTQI+ organizations must intentionally support and make space for the voices and leadership of BIPOC, newcomer, older, and disabled community members, and for Indigenous and other community-based knowledge.



RESILIENCE THEME: Advocating for Climate Justice and Community Investment

Advocates around the world have urged for years that climate, pandemic, and other disasters must not be treated as isolated events but as “moments in which on-going and pre-existing systemic issues, such as housing insecurity and environmental racism, are further exacerbated.”⁹⁴ Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, communities around the world called for a recognition that the impacts of this biological disaster were inseparable from other longstanding “pandemics” of racism, colonialism, and economic injustice. Groups working to end gender-based violence warned that “hard-won progress on gender equality was being lost at alarming speed” to “social and economic damage [that] was both predictable and preventable.”⁹⁵ In other words, a precarious state of being for 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities is built into our flawed and unequal economies, institutions, and physical structures — a constant disaster waiting to happen.

Only more just and equal communities can be truly resilient. 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized people must demand investments in what the Canadian Women’s Foundation has called “shockproofing our

communities”: bold action to secure all people have liveable incomes, food security, access to medical and mental health care and transportation, and safe, climate-resilient housing.⁹⁶ It also means taking comprehensive actions to address anti-Black racism, advance Indigenous reconciliation, and secure equality for all. For 2SLGBTQI+ people, resilience must also mean securing full protection for our human rights — not only formally in law, but in planning and practice within our health care and housing systems and city planning. These and other urgent demands must form the foundations of an intersectional agenda for climate justice that includes structural reforms and investments in just, resilient communities — an agenda 2SLGBTQI+ communities should play a key role in advancing.

As a starting point, 2SLGBTQI+ organizations must make the case to policymakers, loudly and consistently, that the investments in economic, housing, health, and food justice, anti-racism, and reconciliation so central to climate resilience are also core “2SLGBTQI+ issues.”



RESILIENCE THEME: Cultivating Connected, Resilient Communities

Past shocks and crises have shown that resilient communities are connected communities: built and sustained by strong relationships and the “social infrastructure” of neighbourhood gatherings, friend groups, chosen family, grassroots organizing, and mutual aid.⁹⁷ Many models exist for cultivating and resourcing community resilience, based on local conditions and community needs and priorities. Successful solutions are often designed to address multiple community needs at once. 2SLGBTQI+ organizations, working with community members, can explore approaches that include:



Building and sustaining everyday social connectedness and support. Building resilient “social infrastructure” can include a wide variety of approaches that build on existing social, cultural, mentoring, and other activities. Organizations can consider how to intentionally design these programs to help build and sustain connections with neighbours, and across generations and identities, and create community spaces that can act as hubs of informal support.



Supporting mutual aid and sharing skills and resources. For example, Toronto’s St. James Town Community Corner offers tool and seed libraries, and bike, appliance, and e-repair clinics; community co-ops and public libraries in many communities are also expanding their “libraries of things.” 2SLGBTQI+ centres are already hubs for many everyday needs, and in recent years many have supported and cultivated queer, trans, and intersectional mutual aid networks.



Food justice and food sovereignty. Whether on community centre or school grounds, green roofs, home balconies, or indoor “vertical farming,” growing, preserving, and sharing food can help bring people together, maintain cultural foodways, and bolster resilience amid price, supply, and utility disruptions and other shocks.⁹⁸ 2SLGBTQI+ organizations could build on their own meal programs and collaborate with local food justice projects, urban growers, and emerging networks of 2SLGBTQI+ farmers and food workers.⁹⁹



Community integration, capacity-building, and leadership development. 2SLGBTQI+ spaces and groups often, formally and informally, serve as incubators for community leadership and organizing. They can build on this work by offering training, mentorship, meeting space, and staff support for social, cultural, service, organizing, and activist projects that build resilience and address climate impacts.¹⁰⁰ They can also work to be a “backbone” or bridge convening and connecting community members and institutional actors.¹⁰¹



Building connected communities through housing. 2SLGBTQI+ and allied organizations may consider a range of approaches and partnerships to build connected communities through housing. For example, SAGE USA's National LGBTQ+ Housing Initiative supports a growing network of affirming senior living centres that co-locate housing, services, and community space.¹⁰²



Inclusive, resilient, community-based anti-violence work. Climate, pandemic, and shocks and stresses can increase risks for all kinds of gender-based violence, with survivors facing more acute needs and fewer options.¹⁰³ 2SLGBTQI+ organizations can strengthen their anti-violence work, including planning to maintain, modify, and expand supports during emergencies.



Increasing access to green and blue spaces and infrastructure, eco-education, and engagement with the natural world. 2SLGBTQI+ and allied community groups can help community members create and access to open green spaces, tree cover, water features, and structures that help promote natural cooling, cleaner air, flood control, urban gardening, mental health and well-being, and more varied “third spaces” for community-building. Group outings, trips, and camps can be another way to promote access alongside community-building and education.¹⁰⁴ “Queer ecology” education can promote healing by affirming 2SLGBTQI+ bodies and lives as part of the natural world, and offering knowledge that promotes climate action.¹⁰⁵

Critically, building community resilience requires an intersectional focus on the voices, leadership, and needs of intersecting populations who may be more exposed to climate hazards and impacts, including 2SLGBTQI+ older adults, families and children, Newcomers, and BIPOC and disabled communities, as well as 2SLGBTQI+ sex workers, drug users, and unhoused people. As already noted, it may also include advocating with policymakers and funders for bigger investments in programs and infrastructure that support strong communities and community-building.



RESILIENCE THEME: All-Hazards Community Preparedness

While emergency preparedness is only part of a resilience approach, it is critical to ensuring 2SLGBTQI+ people and our neighbours, families, and communities can survive and thrive in the face of climate, pandemic, and other emergencies. As noted above, 2SLGBTQI+ people have often been doing this work together on an ad hoc basis.

We emphasize that 2SLGBTQI+ people, families, and communities need to be informed, connected, and resourced in order to be prepared. Critically, focusing on individual preparedness alone won't work. People are most at risk from climate and emergency events when they're isolated — less likely to receive safety information, and much less able to act on it. Neighbours, friends, and loved ones protect each other by knowing about each other's needs in case of an emergency, checking on each other, sharing resources, and being there to help out. Experts stress that personal check-ins from neighbours, loved ones, volunteers, or agency staff are among the most critical, lifesaving interventions during climate events.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, preparedness efforts should focus not just on one type of disruptive events, but for many types of events that could happen unpredictably and in a cascading fashion — as many communities have seen when facing successive storms or fires combined with an ongoing COVID pandemic¹⁰⁷ and community needs related to anti-2SLGBTQI+ backlash and related policies.¹⁰⁸

In a 2023 report on “Inclusive and Equitable Emergency Management for LGBTQIA+ Communities,” US-based group Out 4 Sustainability calls for cross-sector partnerships to shift from a largely top-down, “one-size-fits-all, utilitarian approach” common in emergency management, to an equity-forward, “whole community approach,”

with 2SLGBTQI+ and allied community groups playing critical roles.¹⁰⁹ Among their recommendations:

- Provide flexible, sustained funding and capacity-building support for 2SLGBTQI+ organizations for emergency planning, emergency funds, and building community resilience.
- Include 2SLGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities in emergency planning and policymaking from the start.
- 2SLGBTQI+ community and health centres and other organizations should work with other community groups, service providers, and affirming faith groups to develop their own community-based plans to support people before, during, and after disasters.
- Government and traditional disaster-aid groups should establish plans, policies, and task forces for equity and nondiscrimination, and tap 2SLGBTQI+ organizations for training and technical assistance.



2SLGBTQI+ and allied organizations can help build community preparedness in many ways, including through partnerships with health and social service, public health, and emergency management agencies. These approaches might include:



Conducting education campaigns and programs that speak to diverse 2SLGBTQI+ communities, including their unique concerns.



Promoting and supporting friend, family, and neighbour-to-neighbour support, including helping people plan together and check on each other, and supplementing this with organization-based check-in calls and visits. Groups like Toronto’s Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW) have been helping neighbours in high-rise apartment buildings organize themselves to stay safe in climate events for years.¹¹⁰



Providing safe spaces and supports before, during, and after climate events and other emergencies. 2SLGBTQI+ community spaces have often functioned informally, or on an ad hoc basis, as meeting points, donation centres, warming and cooling sites, and even emergency shelters. With more planning, resources, and partnerships, they could make even greater impacts as multi-purpose “resilience hubs” or “lighthouses,” promoting resilience and preparedness year-round and ready to offer safe spaces, food, water, electricity, first aid, and help accessing critical services and benefits during any emergency.



Mobilizing volunteers and resources to offer supports across communities, such as through street outreach, visiting isolated community members, emergency transportation, collecting and distributing medications, house cleanups, and even mobile solar/battery power hubs.¹¹¹



Supporting mutual aid networks and establishing flexible, low-barrier emergency funds to help people meet immediate needs.

Resilience Hubs and 2SLGBTQI+ Communities

A “resilience hub” is increasingly used to describe a space or facility that is designed to provide multiple types of everyday and emergency resources that help communities prepare for, adapt to, and recover from climate, pandemic, and other shocks and stresses.¹¹² Resilience hubs often:

- Have resilient buildings and facilities that can stay open during multiple types of emergencies to serve as a cooling, warming, or respite site, meeting point, and crisis information desk.
- Cultivate, convene, and offer space and supports for community-led resilience efforts.
- Offer regular programs that build strong, resilient, prepared, resource-sharing communities.
- Support emergency responses tailored to their communities.
- Model, train, and advise on best practices for inclusive, accessible, resilient buildings, programming, and emergency planning and response.

2SLGBTQI+ organizations could take several approaches to create or support resilience hubs, providing inclusive spaces and supports while building bridges and decreasing stigma, such as:

- Turn 2SLGBTQI+ centres and clinics into resilience hubs by strengthening their buildings, facilities, programs, partnerships to make them more resilient and accessible.
- Partnering with others to create new resilience hubs anchored by co-located programs.
- Build partnerships with existing resilience hubs to share programming, training, referrals, logistical support and emergency planning.



RESILIENCE THEME: Organizational Resilience

2SLGBTQI+ and allied organizations also need to examine the resilience of their own organizations — from their facilities and finances to their staffing and strategic plans — in the face of climate change and other hazards.



Integrating a resilience lens throughout all short-, middle-, and long-term strategic and operational planning (which may include, for example, creating planning tools or framing questions).



Working internally, as well as across organizations, to develop resilience plans that include emergency-response and service-continuity plans.¹¹³ These are plans that are flexible enough to adapt to crises of varied types and durations. Emergency-response elements might include:

- Service continuity plans that identify key decision-points, options, flexibilities, and priorities for maintaining or expanding critical services, and modifying or pausing others.¹¹⁴
- Staffing and volunteer plans to meet increased community needs in a crisis while supporting staff and volunteer well-being.
- Maintaining supplies for a range of scenarios, and considering back-up plans for supply-chain disruptions.
- Integrating preparedness and relevant first aid into staff and volunteer training.
- Defining critical roles and decision-making during emergencies.
- Templates for sharing fast, brief “situation reports” within and between organizations in a crisis.
- Conducting tabletop roleplay exercises to anticipate responding to a crisis.



Evaluating organizational and community responses to prior climate, pandemic, and other emergency events and identifying lessons learned and action steps.



Assessing existing buildings and facilities for how they would perform in a range of extreme weather scenarios and utility disruptions, and seeking capital funding to ensure safe spaces that can maintain power, water, and adequate temperature and air filtration when these may not be available elsewhere.



Addressing risks from climate and other shocks and stresses as part of financial, fundraising, and human-resource plans and collective bargaining, and exploring strategies for mitigating risk and flexibilities for reallocating resources in a crisis.

- This may include, for example, developing strategies to support staff, prevent layoffs, and address issues such as secondary trauma, burnout, and personal and family needs.



Integrating architectural and landscape features in community spaces that promote community connection and well-being, cooling, access to shade, stormwater management, and urban gardening — including “green and blue infrastructure” (such as tree cover, green roofs or walls, and water features) and other approaches.

As with all resilience efforts, organizations should look for opportunities to share knowledge and collaborate on joint planning, training, research, and funding proposals for these efforts.



CONCLUSION

The 519 is still in the beginning stages of this work. We are learning from partners and peers near and far, and exploring ways to integrate a resilience lens throughout our programs, partnerships, operations, and advocacy. We're looking at what resilience means for our building and facilities; in how we run events, serve meals, promote health and well-being, connect people to housing, offer enrichment for children and families, and engage with city planners; and in how we help tenants organize, youth and seniors build connection and mentorship; and newcomers settle and succeed. We know this work will take time. It calls for us to listen to community members, support their leadership, forge new relationships, and redefine what “2SLGBTQI+ issues” mean to funders, at City Hall, and beyond.

2SLGBTQI+ communities have met crisis after crisis, and wave after wave of backlash, with fierce love, care, joyful community-building, and urgent advocacy for justice. We have never accepted injustice or the suffering that results. Today, that is precisely what our communities must do as climate change, and its cascading inequalities, threaten our progress and well-being. 2SLGBTQI+ people, together with others disproportionately exposed to climate risks, can demand change and build resilient, connected communities. As we say at The 519: **We are an Army of Lovers. We shall not fail.**



FOOTNOTES

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Images

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