



## POSITION STATEMENT

### MIDWIFERY, THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

#### STATEMENT

The climate crisis is one of the most urgent and severe threats to human health and lives.<sup>1-4</sup> The environmental consequences of the climate crisis (e.g. increasing temperatures, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events) disproportionately affect girls, women, trans, and nonbinary people, both in the immediate and longer terms.<sup>4-7</sup> The climate crisis impacts sexual and reproductive health (SRH) through worsening health outcomes, which include low birth weight, preterm birth, preeclampsia and eclampsia, hypertension, and length of pregnancy.<sup>4, 8</sup>

Midwives work at the intersection of climate and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and are uniquely positioned to support bodily autonomy and the rights of all individuals to raise families in safe, sustainable environments.<sup>9-12</sup> As essential frontline healthcare providers, midwives provide community-based SRH care, vital to strengthening resilience and improving the health of communities.<sup>8, 13, 14</sup>

#### CONTEXT

At the Canadian Association of Midwives (CAM), we recognize and honour the work of our colleagues at the National Council of Indigenous Midwives (NCIM). Restoring community birth and community sexual, reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is essential to strengthening the health of Indigenous families, communities, and Nations.<sup>15, 16</sup>

We must recognize that Indigenous and Black communities, as well as those in the North, are disproportionately impacted by the ongoing effects of the climate crisis. These communities face heightened risks due to a legacy of systemic inequities rooted in colonialism and racism, which continue to limit access to safe, healthy, and sustainable environments. Addressing these intersecting harms requires recognizing the past and ongoing abuses of reproductive bodies and the structural barriers that have been deliberately maintained to create and reinforce these inequities.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, we must acknowledge our global work in partnership with midwifery associations across different countries. Despite their minimal contribution to global emissions, many of our international partners in low-emitting countries are disproportionately affected by climate change. This work and our position statement on the climate crisis and its link to SRHR must be guided by a decolonizing approach, which respects and integrates diverse perspectives and actively addresses power imbalances and historical injustices.

#### PRINCIPLES

Racial, climate, and reproductive justice are deeply interconnected.<sup>18</sup> The following principles consider the intersections of midwifery, the sustainability of the profession and its responsiveness to climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.<sup>9, 10, 18</sup>

- *Rights-based family planning:* Access to voluntary, rights-based family planning is fundamental to achieving sexual, reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and must be safeguarded.
- *Rejection of population control policies:* CAM firmly opposes population control measures, such as reproductive coercion, forced abortion and sterilization, emphasizing that these approaches do not address the climate crisis and violate fundamental human rights.
- *Community collaboration:* Tailored outreach and participatory decision-making are essential for effective and inclusive climate crisis responses in close partnership with communities.
- *Indigenous midwifery:* Supporting and advocating for the restoration of Indigenous midwifery, access to Indigenous midwives, and centering of Indigenous midwives in providing care.
- *Equity:* It is essential to ensure that comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care prioritizes underserved and oppressed communities, and that midwifery prioritizes the needs and voices of Indigenous, Black, racialized, and 2SLGBTQI+ midwives.
- *Autonomous practice:* Midwives must practice autonomously to provide comprehensive SRHR care, enabling them to contribute to the relevant areas of the climate crisis while remaining responsive during emergencies.
- *Sustainable midwifery practices:* Midwifery services and midwifery associations should integrate environmentally sustainable practices in their day-to-day operations to contribute to overall climate mitigation efforts.
- *Midwives as climate-affected responders:* Midwives are not only essential healthcare workers but also vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis, which can affect their ability to deliver care. Recognizing and supporting midwives to care for themselves and adapt their services during climate-related disruptions is crucial.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Canadian Association of Midwives (CAM) recognizes that addressing the climate crisis requires coordinated and collective action across all sectors. To effectively respond to the climate crisis while safeguarding sexual, reproductive health and rights (SRHR), CAM outlines the following recommendations, divided into two categories: 1) external recommendations aimed at broader collaboration across health and social systems and governmental bodies, and 2) internal recommendations focused on actions within the midwifery profession and CAM specifically.

External recommendations:

- *Optimize midwives' skillset:* Ensure midwives can work to their full competencies and expand flexibility to provide the highest standard of SRHR care without unnecessary consultation or referral.
- *Strengthen midwifery education and training:* Support midwifery education programs and increase training opportunities to build a resilient and sustainable midwifery workforce capable of responding to climate-related SRHR challenges and public health emergencies.

- Strengthen partnerships with civil society: Foster collaborations with organizations to mobilize responses and ensure SRHR is included in national and global climate policy processes.
- Develop flexible provincial and territorial policies: Establish inter-provincial and territorial policies that enable seamless health service delivery across provincial and territorial lines, particularly for individuals displaced by climate-related disasters such as forest fires and floods.
- Enhance interprofessional collaboration: Promote greater collaboration and coordination between healthcare providers to strengthen the health system's response to the climate crisis.
- Advance National Adaptation Plans: Actively contribute to and support the advancement of National Adaptation Plan processes in Canada and globally to ensure SRHR is included in climate resilience and adaptation strategies.
- Support climate-related research: Encourage the research community to generate evidence on the impacts of the climate crisis on SRHR, providing decision-makers, advocates, and planners with the data needed to inform policies and implementation plans.
- Integrate midwives into health systems: Advocate for strategies that fully integrate midwives into health and social systems to ensure their vital role is recognized and maximized in climate crisis response.
- Recognize midwives as essential workers: Ensure midwives are recognized for their critical skills and designated as essential frontline workers, particularly in future public health emergencies such as pandemics, which are expected to increase due to the climate crisis.
- *Engage communities in climate preparedness*: Collaborate with local communities to raise awareness of SRHR services and ensure displaced or underserved populations can access critical health resources during climate emergencies.

#### Internal recommendations:

- Collaborate with aligned organizations: Prioritize partnerships with organizations that explicitly support continuity of care, reproductive justice, and efforts to address the climate crisis.
- Reduce carbon footprint: Implement strategies within midwifery associations to actively reduce carbon footprints, such as optimizing energy use and promoting sustainable practices.
- Encourage divestment: Advocate for the divestment of funds from industries and organizations that significantly contribute to the carbon footprint. This includes ensuring that group RRSPs and other retirement or investment funds do not invest in fossil fuels or other high-emission sectors.
- Sustainable midwifery practices: Provide tools and information that encourage and support individual midwives and midwifery clinics to adopt practices that reduce emissions, such as using fewer disposable supplies when possible or opting for compostable alternatives.
- Environmental performance monitoring and evaluation: Explore the development and implementation of green scorecards or similar tools as a way to assess and potentially enhance the environmental performance of midwifery associations and the sites where midwives deliver services. These tools could focus on areas such as energy and water conservation, waste management, recycling practices, and pollution prevention to support environmentally sustainable healthcare practices where feasible.

- *Integrate climate education:* Embed climate crisis and SRHR content into midwifery education programs and offer continuing professional development to equip midwives with the knowledge needed to address climate-related SRHR conditions.
- *Build internal capacity for climate preparedness:* Provide ongoing training and resources to midwives and staff on how to respond to climate-related health emergencies and SRHR challenges.

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