



Designing Housing for Social Connection, Health, and Climate Resilience

Laura Chow, Senior Planner, Healthy Environments & Climate Change

October 4, 2023

Slides prepared by Meghan Straight

We wish to honour and acknowledge that the land on which we gather is the traditional and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the Musqueam (x^wməθk^wəʔəm), Squamish (S_kwxwú7mesh), and Tsleil-Waututh (səlilwətaʔ) Nations.

Vancouver Coastal Health is committed to delivering exceptional care to 1.2 million people, including the First Nations, Métis and Inuit in our region, within the traditional territories of the Heiltsuk, Kitasoo-Xai'xais, Lil'wat, Musqueam, N'Quatqua, Nuxalk, Samahquam, shíshálh, Skatin, Squamish, Tla'amin, Tsleil-Waututh, Wuikinuxv, and Xa'xtsa.



VCH's Healthy Environments & Climate Change Team

September 2023



Craig Brown
Climate Change &
Health Lead



Laura Chow
Senior Planner



Dr. Michael Schwandt
Medical Health Officer



Iris Chan
Environmental Health
Scientist



Emily Peterson
Environmental Health
Scientist



Jonathan Choi
Regional Manager



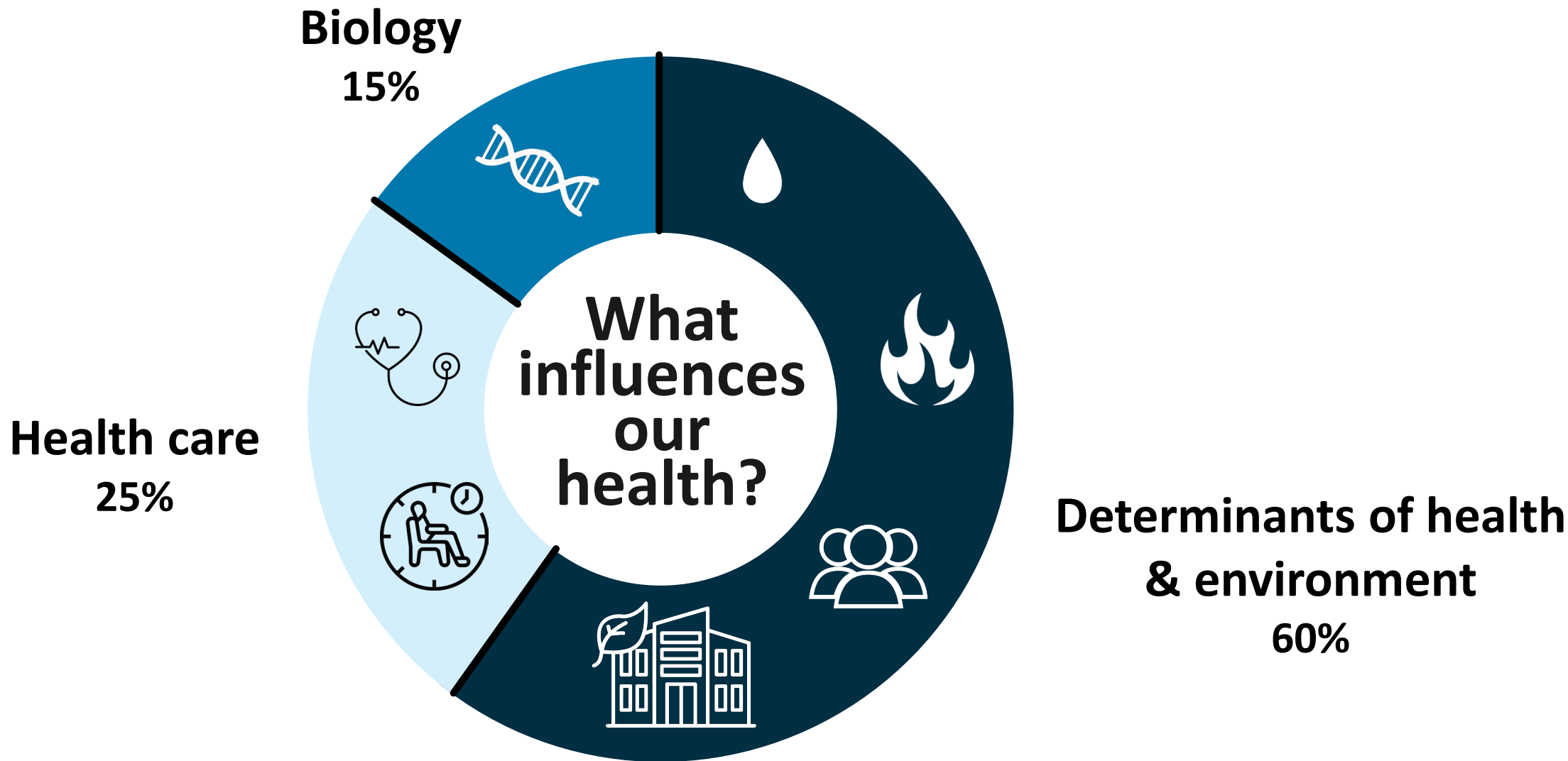
Meghan Straight
Analyst



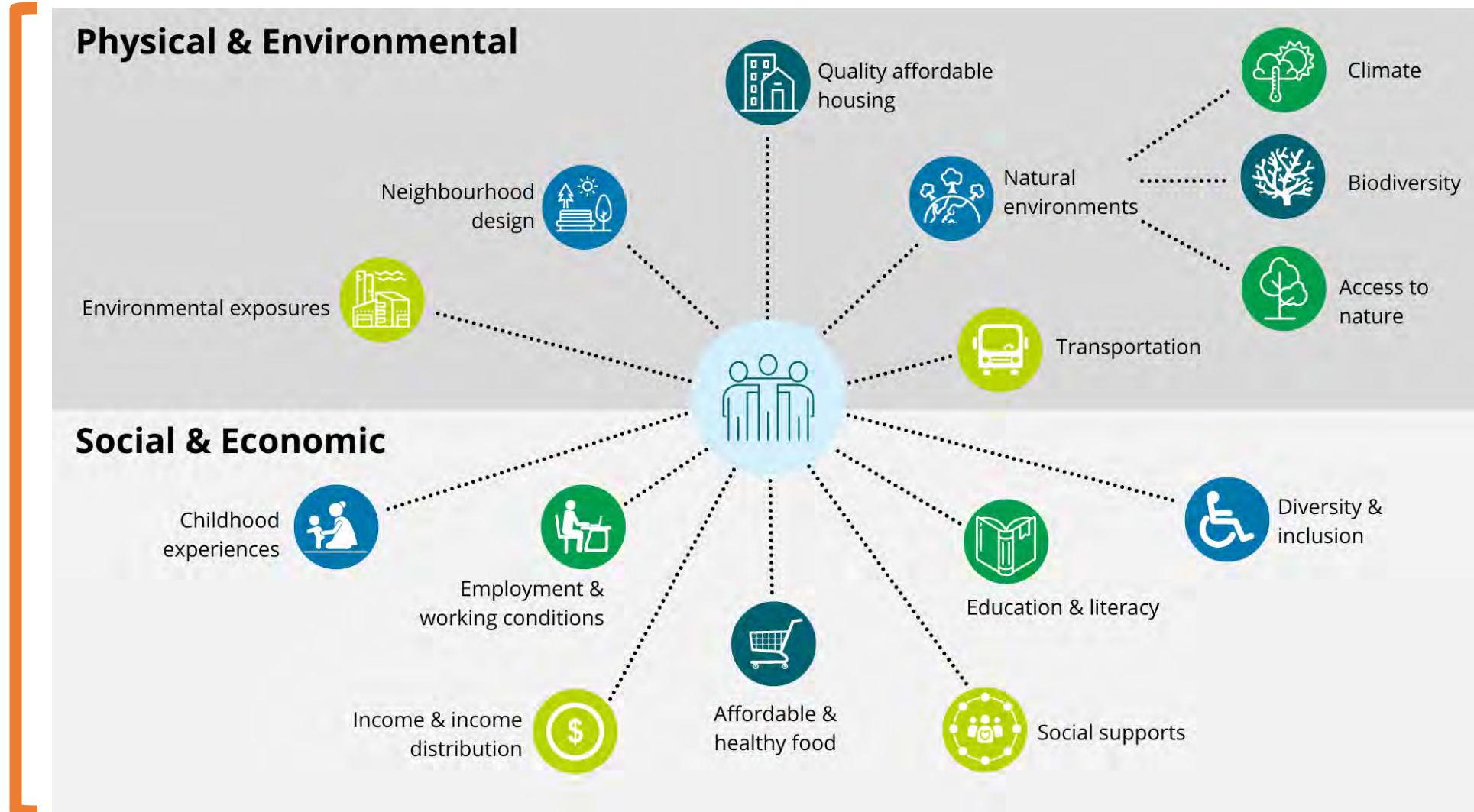
Sammie Hwang
Environmental Health
Officer



Tyler Semler
Project Coordinator /
Analyst



Factors that impact our health



Healthy Environments & Climate Change team





Decisions made by City Council / Elected Officials

Official Community Plans (OCPs), infrastructure
investments, zoning, development fees



**Environments impact
individual health and
agency.**



Decisions made by City Council / Elected Officials

Official Community Plans (OCPs), infrastructure investments, zoning, development fees



Dictate how things look

e.g. where and what type of buildings, trees, parks, roads get built



Environments impact individual health and agency.



Decisions made by City Council / Elected Officials

Official Community Plans (OCPs), infrastructure investments, zoning, development fees



Dictate how things look

e.g. where and what type of buildings, trees, parks, roads get built



Impact lifestyle choices, behaviours, options, and exposures

e.g. food choices, air quality, social connection



Environments impact individual health and agency.



Decisions made by City Council / Elected Officials

Official Community Plans (OCPs), infrastructure investments, zoning, development fees



Dictate how things look

e.g. where and what type of buildings, trees, parks, roads get built



Impact lifestyle choices, behaviours, options, and exposures

e.g. food choices, air quality, social connection



Individual and population health impacts

e.g. chronic diseases, mental health, physical fitness, road and traffic safety, community cohesion

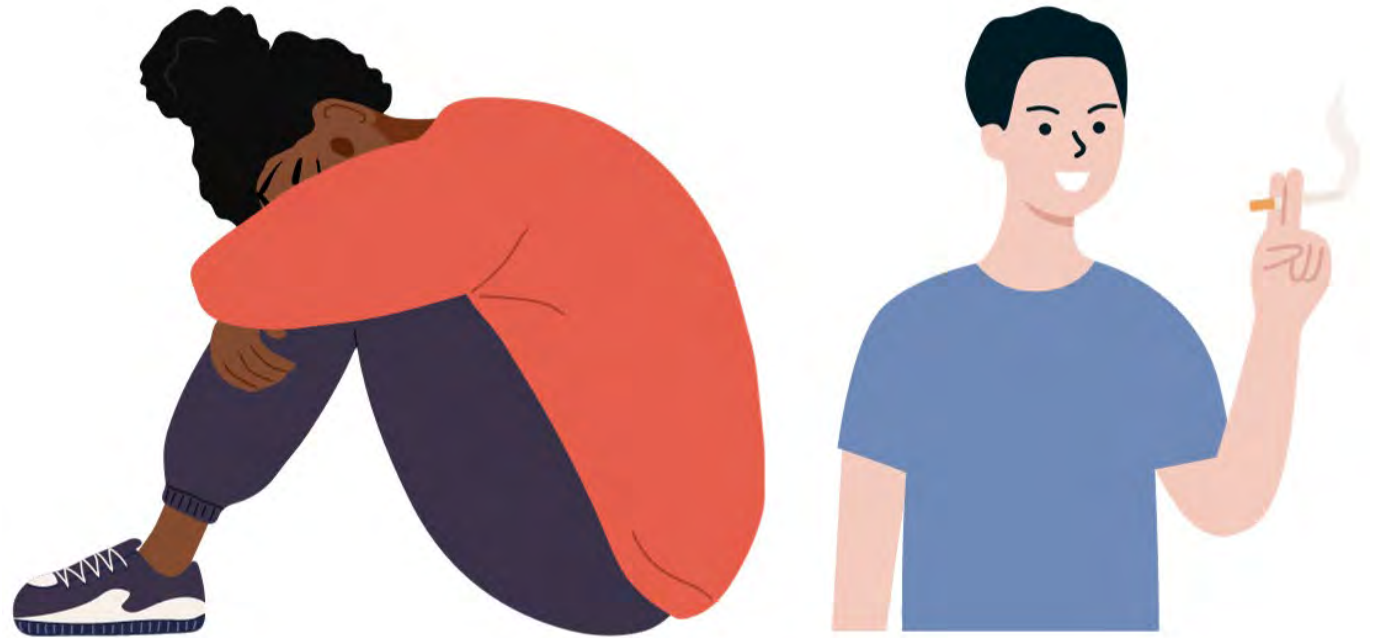
Environments impact individual health and agency.

Social Isolation and Health

Linked to increased risk for:

- Heart disease and stroke
- Type 2 diabetes
- Depression and anxiety
- Addiction
- Suicidality and self-harm
- Dementia
- Earlier death

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023



Social isolation = 15 cigarettes per day

[University of New Hampshire, 2022](#)

Importance of Social Connection for Health

People with strong social connection in Metro Vancouver (2013):

- **2.6x** more likely to report excellent general health
- **3.2x** more likely to report excellent mental health
- Report more healthy behaviours, like physical activity, healthy eating and lower screen time

My Health My Community Social Connections Report, 2018



Shipyards Festival North Vancouver. North Shore News, 2021.

Social Isolation in Canada

People at higher risk:

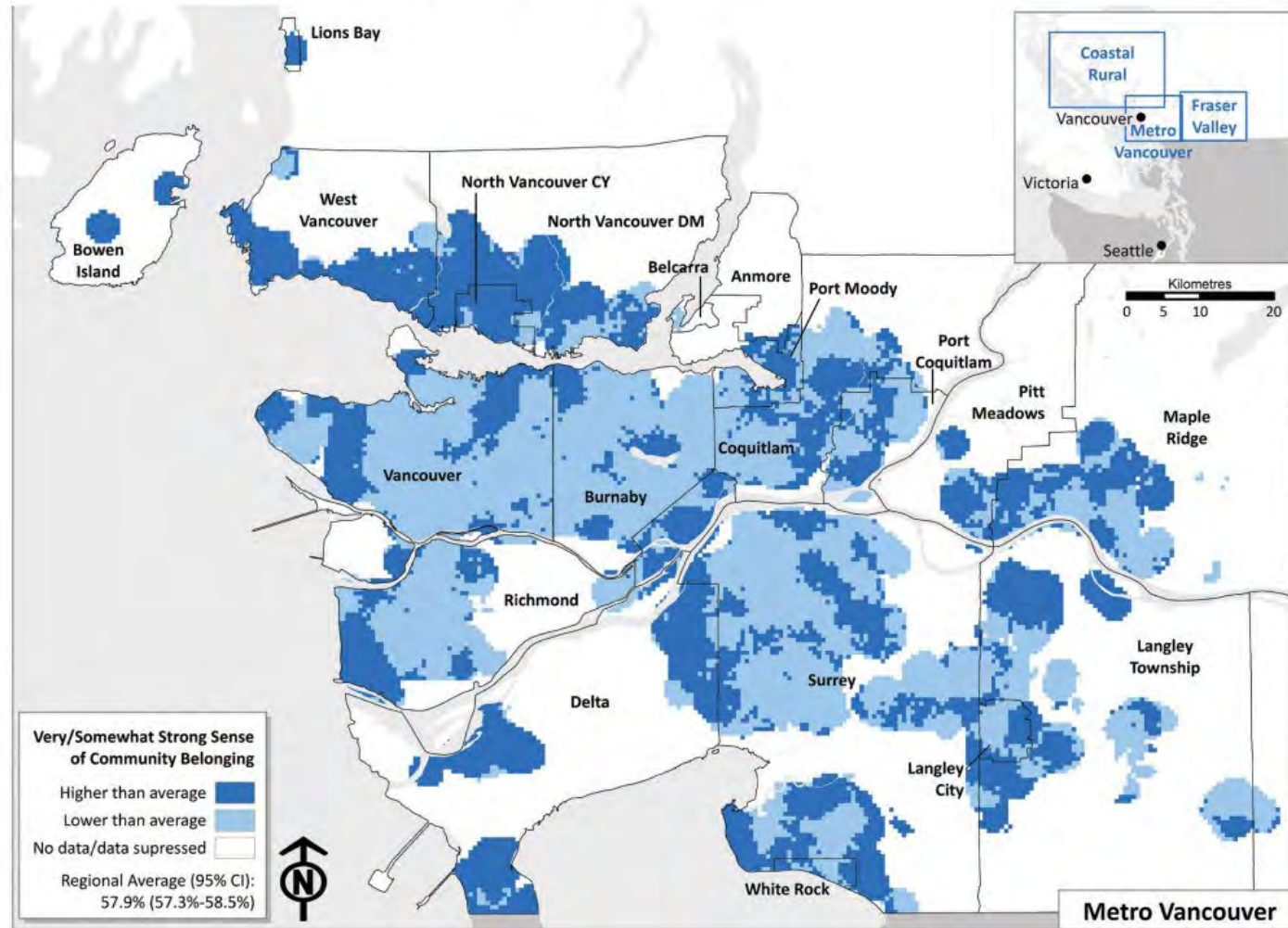
- Low-income adults
- Older adults
- Indigenous peoples
- People with chronic diseases and/ or disabilities, including mental health conditions
- Newcomers to Canada
- People identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer/ Questioning, Two Spirit (LGBTQ2S+)

BCCDC, 2019



Social Isolation in Metro Vancouver

SENSE OF COMMUNITY BELONGING, 2013 - 2014



4+ people to confide in:

- People with higher incomes
- 41% more lesbian/ gay than heterosexuals
- 54% more women than men

Strong sense of community belonging:

- 19% more women than men
- 25% more married / common law than single people
- Aboriginal and South Asian people
- **People with university degrees 22% less likely than those without high school**



How built environment impacts social interactions

- Neighbourhood design
- Transportation, e.g. car vs. walking
- Parks
- Accessibility of amenities and services
- Building design



How built environment impacts social interactions

- Neighbourhood design
- Transportation, e.g. car vs. walking
- Parks
- Accessibility of amenities and services
- Building design



How built environment impacts social interactions

- Neighbourhood design
- **Transportation, e.g. car vs. walking**
- Parks
- Accessibility of amenities and services
- Building design



How built environment impacts social interactions

- Neighbourhood design
- Transportation, e.g. car vs. walking
- **Parks**
- Accessibility of amenities and services
- Building design



How built environment impacts social interactions

- Neighbourhood design
- Transportation, e.g. car vs. walking
- Parks
- **Accessibility of amenities and services**
- Building design



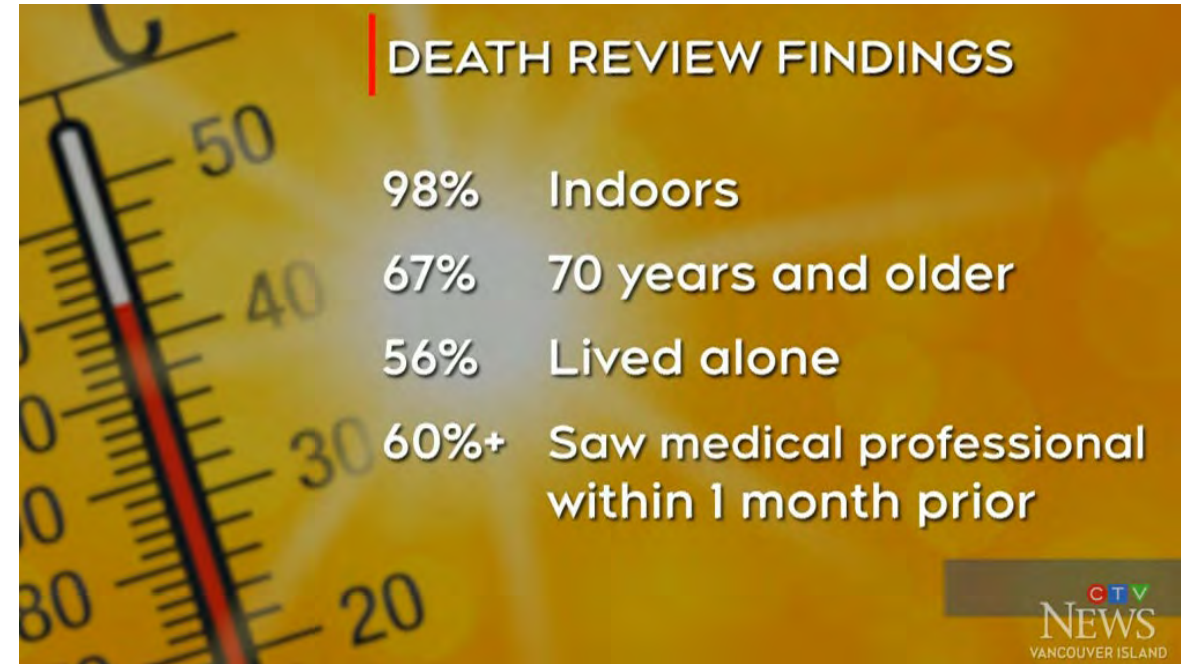
How built environment impacts social interactions

- Neighbourhood design
- Transportation, e.g. car vs. walking
- Parks
- Accessibility of amenities and services
- **Building design**

Case Study: Pandemic + Heat Dome

June 25 – July 1, 2021 heat dome

- 619 deaths related to the heat dome
- COVID-19 pandemic affected public health and health system response
- Typical heatwave measures were difficult
 - Increased social isolation
 - Apprehension going to public cooling spaces
 - Not wanting to perform wellness checks



We don't have, nor can we guarantee resources to care for everyone

Well-designed housing can increase safety (e.g. mechanical cooling, clean air), and enable better connections to mitigate climate-related disasters

"Building practices such as adding suites to homes could potentially reduce social isolation"

Importance of Social Connection for Climate Resilience

- Climate mitigation (prevention)
- Climate adaptation
- Emergencies



It is not
WHAT is in your
emergency kit,
it is
WHO is in your
emergency kit.



We know we need to do better...

The New York Times | <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/world/europe/uk-britain-loneliness.html>

U.K. Appoints a Minister for Loneliness

By Ceylan Yeginsu
Jan. 17, 2018



my Health
my Community

KEY MESSAGES



43% OF RESIDENTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S LOWER MAINLAND REPORT LOW OR VERY LOW SENSE OF COMMUNITY BELONGING.

Loneliness: The hidden mental health crisis costing \$2.7 billion per year

09 January 2023 | Consultancy.com.au | 4 min. read

Considered a time for family festivities, the holiday season can add to the burden for those experiencing loneliness. A new KPMG report examines the economic cost of the hidden epidemic.

A report conducted by [KPMG](#) in collaboration with the Groundswell Foundation has found that more than a quarter of Australians experience frequent loneliness, including over a third of young adults.

Not simply just an emotional burden, the growing issue can have serious physical and mental health repercussions, and is estimated to cost the Australian economy some \$2.7 billion per year in direct healthcare support.

25%
of Australians
are lonely

37%
of young people
are lonely

Loneliness
costs the
Australian economy
\$2.7b
annually

26%
Increased risk of
death for lonely
people

54%
of Australians
reported feeling
lonelier after the
pandemic

US Surgeon General calls for action regarding the ongoing 'epidemic of loneliness and isolation'

Recent research shows half of U.S. adults experienced loneliness daily.

By [Emma Egan](#)

May 2, 2023, 2:06 AM



Let's talk about how we do better...



Heat Response in DTES. Ben Nelms, CBC.



West Richmond Pride Dance Fitness. Richmond News, 2019.



Powell River Blackberry Festival. Peak News, 2023.



Lynn Valley Community Garden. St Clements, 2013.



Thank You

Laura Chow

laura.chow@vch.ca

www.vch.ca/climatechange