



Envisioning an end to energy
insecurity in Canada

HOME ENERGY JUSTICE FORUM

PROCEEDINGS REPORT

May 27, 2025 in Vancouver, BC
on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Territories



Our Community Energy program is committed to a future in which energy justice is achieved in Canada — where everyone has affordable access to essential home energy services while living in comfortable, healthy homes. This transition will also catalyze a future in which communities use localized, climate safe, and resilient energy systems.

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“Old buildings aren’t just inefficient, they are stories of long-standing neglect, and when we talk about retrofitting, it’s easy to focus on heat pumps and insulation, but what we are talking about is transforming daily life, restoring dignity.”

- Jofri Issac, Researcher, Royal Roads University



Summary

On May 27, 2025, Ecotrust Canada held its second Home Energy Justice Forum. Over 110 attendees came together in Vancouver, BC, on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Territories, to envision an end to energy insecurity. The Forum focused on British Columbia, where low-carbon home retrofits, energy affordability, and resilience to extreme heat are increasingly seen as critical and holistic policy issues.

The Home Energy Justice Forum was an interactive all-day event, providing attendees the opportunity to connect and explore the latest research, policy progress, and lived experiences on the issue of energy insecurity. The event included sessions on equitable decarbonization across neighbourhoods, protecting tenants and vulnerable populations from extreme heat events, and supporting community-wide climate resilience initiatives.



The Central Issue

One million Canadian households experience energy insecurity, also called energy poverty, including over 250,000 households in BC. This means families are suffering from illness and stress caused by unhealthy temperatures and poor air quality in the home, a problem that is only getting worse as our summers get hotter and smokier. It also means that many people must choose between paying their utility bills or paying for rent and groceries. The most vulnerable households in Canada – including renters – face growing risks.

We believe that household energy security is possible in Canada when all households:

- can access essential home energy services like heating, cooling, cooking, and lighting without hardship;
- live in comfortable, healthy homes with affordable energy bills;
- use efficient, resilient, and low-carbon energy sources.



Homes in Port McNeill, BC, on Kwakiutl First Nation Territory

| *What We Heard*

► Key action items identified by Forum participants included:

Immediate Protections

- Regulate safe indoor temperatures in rental units, both provincially and municipally
- Deploy emergency cooling solutions in homes, such as window shades and air conditioners (or heat pumps if possible)
- Leverage climate and building data to prioritize the homes at greatest risk of overheating

Systemic Changes

- Convert most existing mechanical systems to heat pumps, and incorporate passive cooling measures in residential buildings
- Increase the stock of cooperative, non-profit, and public housing, and secure targeted, flexible, and long-term funding for this housing
- Support contractor training and capacity in rural areas that are underserved by key trades such as HVAC
- Develop an integrated utility resource and energy plan for BC, replacing the siloed approach currently taken by BC Hydro and FortisBC
- Align retrofit programs with climate action goals where possible, but recognize that improving public health and affordability can also be the primary objective

- Recognize safe and affordable housing as a human right, including the right to healthy indoor temperatures

Community Empowerment

- Tailor messaging and language to the needs and concerns of communities
- Shift retrofit program design and delivery to a model that is led and co-created by the communities these programs are intended to serve
- Ensure support for ongoing Indigenous-led decision-making in programs affecting Indigenous housing and energy
- Empower tenants with tools to report on and organize around unsafe housing conditions
- Increase funding and support for rural and Indigenous communities, and centre their unique context and needs, including skill training and retention
- Involve youth organizations such as Youth Climate Corps to install projects and retrofit buildings
- Transfer and share learnings from successful projects in rural, remote and Indigenous communities
- Secure targeted, flexible, and long-term funding for band-owned and non-profit housing

Our Next Steps

Following the publication of this Proceedings Report, Ecotrust Canada's Energy team will take what we've learned from the Forum and use it to better inform our ongoing policy and research work in BC. We will continue to advocate for programs, policies, and funding that support vulnerable populations to move out of energy insecurity and advance energy justice. Our work for the remainder of 2025 includes:

- Engaging with leading BC municipalities to advance a Right to Cooling and thermal safety regulations for vulnerable tenants; 38% of tenant households in BC live in unaffordable units – spending over 30% of their pre-tax household income on their housing (Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census)
- Advancing an equitable decarbonization and climate resilience pilot project in a BC manufactured home park, following up on our research on this topic. Manufactured homes make up 4% of households in BC, and on average have 61% higher energy use per square foot than other dwelling types (Source: BC Hydro).
- Supporting our Indigenous partner communities to complete energy-saving and climate-resilience retrofits, and advocating for program improvements that can make these projects more successful and scalable. Indigenous communities in BC often face energy costs that are double the Canadian household average. Ecotrust Canada has been working with Indigenous communities on retrofit projects since 2017, enabling over 500 households to save \$12.5 million on energy costs, while eliminating over 18,000 tonnes of GHG emissions and providing lifesaving cooling during heat waves.
- Delivering our Home Energy Savings Program to support hundreds of residents in northern coastal BC with free one-on-one home retrofit advice, helping them navigate energy-efficient upgrades.



A heat pump installed at a home in
'Namgis First Nation, Alert Bay, BC

Attendees

Over 110 attendees contributed to the Home Energy Justice Forum.

The following organizations were represented at the 2025 Forum:

- Aboriginal Housing Management Association
- BC ACORN
- BC Centre for Disease Control
- BC Hydro
- BC Non-Profit Housing Association
- BC Poverty Reduction Coalition
- Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
- Canadian Association of Consulting Energy Advisors
- City of Abbotsford
- City of New Westminster
- City of North Vancouver
- City of Vancouver
- City of Victoria
- CoEfficient Building Science Ltd.
- Community Energy Association
- District of Saanich
- Dogwood
- Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society
- Ecotrust Canada
- Squamish Nation
- First United
- First Nation Emergency Services Society
- Fraser Basin Council
- Fraser Health
- FRESCo
- Government of British Columbia
- Home Performance Stakeholder Council
- Home Sharing Support Society BC
- Houssian Foundation
- Indigenous Clean Energy
- Iron & Earth
- Kambo Energy Group
- Musqueam
- New Relationship Trust
- Pembina Institute
- Prism Engineering
- LandlordBC
- Royal Roads University
- Spark Northwest
- Stand.earth
- Swiilawiid Sustainability Society
- Tawâw Strategies
- Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre
- Tsilhqot'in National Government
- UBC Centre for Climate Justice
- University of British Columbia
- Vancity
- Vancouver Coastal Health
- Westerhoff Climate Strategies
- Youth Climate Corps BC
- Zero Emissions Innovation Centre



Presentations and Panelists

The 2025 Forum hosted 23 speakers, including expert panelists from diverse fields, including the government, non-profit, housing, and energy sectors. The Forum also provided a venue to present several new pieces of research, including in-house reports on advancing thermal safety regulations for tenants and catalyzing retrofits in manufactured home parks (also known as mobile home parks). It also included research produced by UBC students in collaboration with Ecotrust Canada on equitable decarbonization pathways for BC's homes and buildings.

After hearing from our expert panelists on these subjects, participants had the opportunity to workshop ideas and recommendations that surfaced, to refine them further, and to discuss their strengths and weaknesses. We found there was considerable alignment around the path forward, despite the very diverse background and fields of practice that attendees each brought to their tables. The themes and practices noted in this report were drawn from the notes of facilitated table discussions as well as questions and comments raised in the plenary by both speakers and participants.

Video recordings of the panel sessions [are available here](#).



| Research and Pre-Reading Materials

Two pieces of research were produced by Ecotrust Canada, and a third was completed by UBC Master of Public Policy and Global Affairs students under the guidance of Ecotrust Canada's Community Energy team.

In addition, three important pieces of external research were published around the time of the Forum and were discussed by panelists and participants. Links to these reports are provided below, as they provide important context for discussions held at the Forum.

Ecotrust Canada Research:

- [Safe Indoor Temperatures and Decarbonization in Rental Units](#), Ecotrust Canada
- [Manufactured Home Retrofits in BC](#), Ecotrust Canada

UBC Student Research:

- [Applying an Equity Lens to British Columbia Decarbonization Policies: Potential Impacts on Residential Sector Energy Access and Affordability](#), by UBC Master of Public Policy and Global Affairs students

External Research:

- [Crumbling Apartments in a Warming World: Tenants in an Energy Cost Crisis](#), ACORN Canada
- [Thermal Safety in Existing Multi-Unit Residential Buildings](#), Westerhoff Climate Strategies
- [Valuing Deep Retrofits](#), Pembina Institute

Themes

Attendees were united in recognizing the need to ramp up programs and regulations that serve to protect BC residents from the impacts of extreme weather, and extreme heat in particular.

They advocated for a human rights and public health-centric approach, one that directs **public money to those who need it most** and prioritizes the most vulnerable populations as well as buildings that are especially prone to overheating. BC's recent shift from offering retrofit grants to all residents to providing larger grants for low- and moderate-income households is a good example of this approach.

Attendees emphasized the need for proactive outreach, engagement, and enforcement in rental buildings, as tenants typically have **little agency** over their buildings and are at **greater risk** of being trapped in an unsafe housing situation. Persons with physical or mental disabilities were also identified as high-risk populations that require dedicated support and programming to ensure that they are not left alone in dangerously hot or cold homes during extreme weather events.

Attendees spoke of a disconnect between the design model of existing retrofit programs and outcomes that support equity. Many suggested that energy efficiency and retrofit **programs**

should be designed and delivered by the communities they serve – or at least, by a government or third-party agency rather than by utilities, which have historically failed to deliver meaningful results.

Participants repeatedly identified siloed government departments, organizations, and approaches as a barrier to effective policy and programming. They reiterated the need for cross-government initiatives that are accountable for ensuring that everyone has a healthy,

comfortable, and energy-efficient place to live. This could be facilitated by bringing together different groups and sectors to create a shared strategy that also addresses energy insecurity and

climate adaptation for housing.

In discussions on new home construction, most participants emphasized the need for more social and co-operative housing. Many participants also agreed that **increasing the amount of cooperative, non-profit, and public housing** might be more effective in achieving tenants' energy rights than incentivizing or regulating landlords, who typically see housing as an investment vehicle.

Participants shared views about how the political context for **decarbonization is increasingly**

Energy justice cannot be achieved unless those most impacted people have agency and control over the programs and resources that are delivered to their communities.

challenging, with many policymakers and governments walking back their climate commitments. In particular, the limited cost savings realized by switching from fossil gas to electricity, exacerbated by the cancellation of BC's carbon tax, present a significant barrier to decarbonization in homes and buildings.

Participants were nearly unanimous in recognizing the **importance of regional networks and local champions** as a key, or even a mandatory, component of any community retrofit and/or decarbonization strategy. Local networks and champions spur action on the ground and provide important local contact and context. Champions also help maintain trust, relationships and accountability to organizations, community members, and funders. To ensure

continuity, these positions must be adequately supported and salaries funded.

Part and parcel to the concept of local and regional leadership is the importance of true community engagement and support in any project, putting community at the heart of leadership. This was a constant theme that came up throughout the day. **Energy justice cannot be achieved unless those most impacted people have agency and control over the programs and resources that are delivered to their communities.** This shift would serve to improve the outreach, framing, communication methods, and language used. Participants emphasized the need for effective and tailored messaging that speaks directly to community needs and values.



“I have been in lots of communities and have done lots of community engagement and I’ve never heard a community member say, *‘I want a more efficient grid,’* or *‘I want my home to use less emissions.’* ... What we hear is: *‘my bill is too high, my home is too warm in the summer, I don’t understand my bill, ... I’m worried about my job security, housing security, overcrowding.’* ...

[We need to] start to work with the community to create education programs with a climate co-benefit, a housing program with a climate co-benefit, and a workforce program with a climate co-benefit. Because that’s what starts to centre the needs of communities and will get better uptake from the communities that are really vulnerable and feeling the negative effects of climate right now.”

– Yasmin Abraham, President, Kambo Energy Group



Workshop Session 1: Climate Resilience and Public Health

This session considered the public health and climate safety benefits of energy-efficient, low-carbon homes and buildings. In contrast to traditional approaches to energy efficiency and decarbonization, which have framed improved health outcomes and climate resilience as “co-benefits,” this session framed these outcomes as primary objectives of advancing building codes, retrofits, and regulations.

Panelists:

Dr. Michael Schwandt, Medical Health Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health

Leya Behra, Deputy Director, Climate Action, City of New Westminster

Lisa Westerhoff, Principal Owner, Westerhoff Climate Strategies

Robert Patterson, Staff Lawyer, Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre

Moderator: Betsy Agar, Buildings Director, Efficiency Canada

Workshop discussions for this session were divided into two streams: the first focused on climate-resilient and healthy homes for tenants, while the second looked at First Nations band-owned and non-profit housing.



“Energy justice can deliver numerous public health benefits, supporting climate-resilient housing, safer living spaces and affordability.”

– Dr. Michael Schwandt, Medical Health Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health

▶ Key Actions:

- Regulate safe indoor temperatures in rental units, both provincially and municipally
- Leverage climate and building data to prioritize the homes at greatest risk of overheating
- Convert existing mechanical systems to heat pumps where possible, and incorporate passive cooling measures in residential buildings
- Recognize safe and affordable housing as a human right, including the right to healthy indoor temperatures
- Tailor messaging and language to the needs and concerns of communities
- Secure targeted, flexible, and long-term funding for band-owned and non-profit housing
- Support contractor training and capacity in rural areas that are underserved by key trades such as HVAC



Panelists (from left to right) Robert Patterson, Dr. Michael Schwandt, and Leya Behra, open the first workshop session of the day on Climate Resilience and Public Health.

Climate-Resilient and Healthy Homes For Tenants

Question 1 on effective bylaws for safe indoor temperatures

What would you include in a municipal bylaw regulating safe indoor temperatures to ensure it is effective for tenants? E.g., What is needed for effective implementation and enforcement? How should it be measured?

Participants emphasized that bylaw development should include multiple criteria such as tenant health, temperature, and air quality. They advocated for a holistic approach that shifts from the current complaints-driven system to one that proactively protects tenants. Suggested proactive measures included business licensing for rental units with annual maintenance compliance checks, mandatory retrofit requirements, or creating health scores to rate rental properties.

Specific suggestions for keeping buildings cool included providing cooling kits to residents, adding building protections like better insulation, installing shade structures, using passive cooling methods that don't require electricity, and incorporating nature-based solutions like trees and vegetation.

Panelists stressed the importance of incorporating future climate data in building modelling, as well as prioritizing particularly at-risk units (e.g., top floors, south or west-facing units). In general, they identified that the availability of building-level data, including baseline temperature measurements and patterns, is a critical tool for prioritizing buildings

that need protection from overheating and underheating.

Technology-specific suggestions included conversions of current A/C units and electric baseboards to heat pumps, as well as converting make-up air (MUA) units to heat pumps to enable cooling in common areas. Overglazing is an issue in some buildings and may need to be addressed using window shading, chromatic glass, or replacing windows with opaque wall assemblies.

Participants said that cooling systems should be required to undergo professional testing (also known as commissioning) to make sure they keep indoor temperatures at the intended levels.

Question 2 on addressing air quality or other health/safety issues

Can temperature regulations (municipal or provincial) also address air quality or other indoor health/safety issues? E.g. How to improve homes to be better shelters in overlapping heat and wildfire events?

Participants discussed that regulating indoor temperatures would probably also improve air quality. This is because buildings use mechanical heating, cooling, and ventilation systems to maintain thermal compliance. These systems typically include robust filtration, especially in newly installed models, which may include MERV or HEPA filters. They identified the need to maintain systems and regularly change air filters as a challenge.



Question 3 on avoiding adverse financial consequences on tenants

How can municipalities and provincial policymakers design temperature regulations to prevent landlords from passing costs onto tenants through rent increases and high utility cost burdens? E.g. How can passive cooling measures be incorporated into safe temperature regulation (as opposed to relying exclusively on air-conditioning)? What tenant protections or rental housing supports do tenants need? Should the government make changes to the Residential Tenancy Act / Strata Act? What legal guidance do municipalities need from the provincial government?

Participants suggested several ways to avoid rent increases caused by new building codes or regulations, such as rental covenants and vacancy control. Participants also suggested changing rules around Allowable Rent Increases (ARIs) to better protect existing tenants. For example, ARIs could have a time limit so they are no longer applicable in perpetuity, or they could be eliminated entirely.

The panelists also discussed the challenges building owners face when having to comply with temperature regulations. Some participants argued that compliance was simply a cost of doing business that could be subsidized through incentive programs or tax breaks, while others felt that the housing model must shift to recognize safe and affordable housing as a human right.

One participant suggested that governments should combine regulations with adequate public funding to help building owners make upgrades, preventing them from passing costs to tenants.

Question 4 on provincial guidance and regulations

What provincial guidance and regulation do we need to enable safe temperatures in existing buildings?

Participants felt that the commodification of housing was a significant barrier to the Province of BC developing guidance and regulation for safe indoor temperatures – the government was seen as having limited agency compared to large

building owners. However, existing regulatory tools such as the BC Building Code, proposed Alterations Code, Energy Step Code, and others could provide mechanisms for enforcement.

Participants identified the guarantee of a tenant's "Right to Cooling" in the Residential Tenancy Act and Strata Property Act as a good first step. They also noted that without rental protections and tenure security, it is harder to enforce or assert other rights.

In terms of guidance and information democracy, the participants discussed the concept of mandatory energy labelling and disclosure as a non-regulatory measure that the Province could take. Several models exist, such as those summarized by [European Commission](#) guidance (Table 4.1, p. 44). Transparency on whether a building/unit has cooling, and what typical utility bill costs are for the unit, are also good policies to pursue.

Question 5 on approaches for single-detached homes vs rental apartment buildings

What are the different approaches needed for regulation in single-detached homes vs rental apartment buildings?

In single detached homes, rental tenants were seen to have more agency and ability to make changes in their suites. However, in homes where there is a single electricity metre and/or thermostats that the tenant cannot access, it makes it more difficult for tenants to control their consumption and indoor temperatures. For these homes, it may be appropriate to ensure that a Right to Cooling exists, combined with appropriate incentives and programs that a tenant could access to receive help installing

cooling measures (e.g. A/C, heat pump, or passive cooling measures).

For rental apartment buildings, participants said that a stronger regulatory approach was necessary due to the lack of agency that tenants have over their unit and the operation of their building. For rental apartments (and high-rise apartments in particular), some of the panellists stressed the importance of maximum temperature regulations.

Technical challenges are likely to be greater for apartment buildings, making new technologies such as window-mounted heat pumps more necessary. In addition, larger buildings may encounter barriers related to electrical capacity, making the use of load management or load sharing devices potentially important to avoid costly service upgrades.



Question 6 on the pros and cons of provincial vs municipal regulations

What are the pros and cons of provincial vs municipal regulation of safe temperatures in homes?

At a high level, panellists said that municipal regulation could provide greater flexibility and adaptability, allowing for solutions that meet the unique cultural and environmental needs of each municipality. On the other hand, they discussed that provincial regulations provide more consistency, and a province-wide approach was considered very important to some attendees, and key to successful implementation.

Multiple participants expressed that the provincial government must create a framework for regulating indoor temperatures and renovation protections before municipal temperature bylaws could be effective.

However, despite the benefits of a unified, provincial approach to regulation, participants

discussed municipal regulations as having many advantages, including being more nimble, personalized, and appropriate for the local context, with typically better communication and access for building owners and tenants. One participant proposed a solution that the provincial government develop the regulations, but they are enforced and communicated at the municipal level.

Municipal regulation increases costs compared to broad standards, and municipalities lack sufficient budgets to enforce regulations. Participants identified jurisdictional inconsistencies and conflicts as major barriers that would undermine implementation and support from building owners and operators.

Panellists favoured a hybrid approach where the Province enshrines the “Right to Cool” and the human right to healthy homes in legislation, while municipalities create maximum temperature bylaws and complaint-driven enforcement.



Non-Profit and First Nations Band-Owned Housing

Question 1 on federal/provincial policy

What policies are required at the provincial or federal level to enable climate adaptation of non-profit housing? Of band-owned homes? E.g. legislative changes, or funding structure changes?

Beginning from a human rights and equity standpoint, many participants felt that enshrining the right to adequate heating and cooling, and the right to a healthy home, was the most important step for climate adaptation in these housing types.

Participants clearly identified that non-profit and band-owned housing requires targeted, adequate, and long-term funding for both new builds and retrofits, to ensure that homes can be made safe.

Participants emphasized that policies and funding must fit each community's specific needs. They rejected one-size-fits-all approaches and called for data collection to understand local differences and specific needs.

Participants also saw a critical need for more holistic and collaborative funding approaches that involve multiple layers of government and incorporate capacity development, noting that current funding programs are siloed and inflexible. For example, the CleanBC Social Housing Incentives Program (SHIP) is available for MURBs but does not include envelope funding, whereas the CleanBC Energy Savings Program (ESP) provides envelope funding but it not available for tenants that do not have a utility account in their name (e.g. when utilities are included in rent).

Participants emphasized that policies and funding must fit each community's specific needs. They rejected one-size-fits-all approaches.

Question 2 on climate adaptation/resilience as a framework

Is climate adaptation/resilience a useful framework for non-profit and band housing? How can this be better integrated with other priorities, such as repairs, health and safety, affordability, energy efficiency, decarbonization?

Participants flagged climate adaptation and resilience as very important for non-profit and band housing, but they noted there are communication issues regarding this framing because some residents of these housing types do not necessarily think of extreme weather as climate issues.

The participants suggested tailoring messaging and language to the needs and concerns of communities as a key to reaching residents. For example, using terms with more tangible implications such as "wildfire," "heat wave," "power outage," or even "affordability." In addition, they stressed the need to compensate non-profit and First Nation housing providers/residents for their time and engagement regarding climate resilience planning.

Some participants noted that messaging needs to be people-focused, such as talking about health and affordability rather than environmental goals like reducing GHG emissions/decarbonization. However, the actual way to make unhealthy housing healthy is through energy efficiency improvements and decarbonization. This was connected to the wider need for holistic and integrated approaches that combine health, affordability, energy efficiency, resilience and adaptation.

Question 3 on support needed for smaller communities

What support do smaller communities need to make homes more climate resilient? For example, are particular resources needed for non-profit and band housing located outside of major urban centres? If yes, what are they?

Participants noted that providing the same level of support or funding to all communities is not

always equitable, and that smaller communities may need greater support. Necessary supports for smaller communities identified included greater funding for northern and remote communities, more flexible funding models, customized and supportive application processes, and funding for local staff to support programs.

Participants identified the lack of skilled contractors and consultants in rural areas as a critical issue that creates multiple problems. For example, in addition to raising costs, the lack of contractor access in remote areas can impact the ability of residents to insure their homes. Predatory pricing by local contractors with a near-monopoly is an issue, and other contractors may be unwilling to travel to these areas. When they do, costs can be very high, and outside contractors are less likely to give back to the community in other ways, e.g. mentorship, education, and ongoing service.





Workshop Session 2: Equitable Decarbonization

This session focused on advancing an equitable decarbonization of the built environment. Participants considered two pathways to advancing equitable decarbonization in buildings: One stream considered communities and projects, and the other considered legislation, regulation and policy.

Panelists:

Robyn Ashwell, Researcher, Ecotrust Canada

Chris Higgins, Senior Green Building Planner, City of Vancouver

Kayla Fayant, Energy Advisor Program Manager, Indigenous Clean Energy

Mariko Michasiw, Program Manager, Building to Electrification Coalition

Moderator: Jessica McIlroy, Buildings Program Manager, Pembina Institute



“I think programs really need to understand the unique needs and contexts of the communities that we’re working in, especially for Indigenous groups... and I think we do that by co-developing policies and programs with communities and equity deserving groups.”

– Kayla Fayant, Energy Advisor Program Manager, Indigenous Clean Energy

▶ Key Actions:

- Shift retrofit program design and delivery to a model that is led and co-created by the communities these programs are intended to serve.
- Ensure support for ongoing Indigenous-led decision-making in programs affecting Indigenous housing and energy.
- Increase funding and support for rural and Indigenous communities, and centre their unique context and needs, including skill training and retention.
- Develop an integrated utility resource and energy plan for BC, replacing the siloed approach currently taken by BC Hydro and FortisBC
- Align retrofit programs with climate action goals where possible, but recognize that improving public health and affordability can also be the primary objective
- Involve youth organizations such as Youth Climate Corps to install projects and retrofit buildings
- Transfer and share learnings from successful projects in rural, remote and Indigenous communities



Moderator Jessica McIlroy (left) and panelist Chris Higgins speak about equitable decarbonization across communities.

Communities and Projects Pathway

Question 1: Accelerating decarbonization for underserved communities

How can efforts to accelerate decarbonization and improve climate resilience better reach underserved communities?

Participants stressed that underserved communities need greater agency and control over the program designed to serve them. Co-creation of programming and building trust are important if any program is to be successful.

Participants felt that, in contrast, current programs are often misaligned with the needs of communities. They suggested several ways to address this imbalance, including funding climate-related roles in communities, the development of regional and local networks, and utilizing local champions and trusted messengers.

Question 2: Indigenous community context

What does climate resilience and equitable decarbonization mean in the Indigenous community context? What cultural and geographic factors are being neglected by government and utility programs?

Participants at the Forum felt that Indigenous communities are already leading the way on climate resilience, despite a history of systemic disadvantage and neglect from governments and utilities companies.

Indigenous communities are experts at balancing local context, needs, and knowledge with existing

systems and programs. Participants identified possible improvements, including recognition of inter-generational housing in program income qualification, as well as modelling and program design that considers higher occupancy levels.

Geographic factors are not always considered, including BC's extremely diverse climates and varying levels of remoteness that affect both energy access and the frequency and duration of power outages. Participants noted that the process of engagement and consensus-building is very different in urban areas, which may involve multiple First Nations' overlapping territories, than rural areas, where there may only be one First Nation to engage with.



Question 3: Local energy resources in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities

Indigenous communities are leading the way in demonstrating that decarbonization, healthy homes, and an equitable energy system are possible (for example, Heiltsuk Nation's community-wide heat pump project in partnership with Ecotrust Canada).

What lessons from rural and remote Indigenous communities developing and distributing local energy resources, such as community-scale renewables, biomass energy, housing and land governance, can be applied to urban and settler communities?

One of the biggest lessons participants learned was that rural and remote Indigenous

communities have a relatively high buy-in for these projects. They gave multiple reasons for why there is more alignment in these communities, including the creation of economic opportunities, improving affordability, advancing community priorities, creating jobs, and fostering energy independence and resiliency.

Some challenges were identified as being particularly hard to overcome in these communities included the high rate of local staff turnover and the difficulty of retaining talent in rural areas.

The impact of the COVID pandemic was also deeper and longer lasting in remote communities, with many still recovering. Funding tends to be challenging in these communities, with remoteness or climate (in the north) significantly escalating project cost and complexity.



Utility, Regulatory, and Legislative Pathway

Question 1: Utility Regulator Role & Equity/Climate/Resilience Goals

Should utility regulators be required to consider equity, climate, and resilience goals in their decision-making, or should the role of the regulator remain purely economic and rate-focused?

Participants agreed that BC needs an integrated utility resource plan completed by all utilities that provides a single demand forecast and supply outlook for both the gas and electric systems. Currently, Fortis BC and BC Hydro have different and competing long-term visions, and incompatible reference case assumptions for future demand.

Some participants argued that utilities are already required to consider equity through low-income demand-side management (DSM) programs mandated by the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC), while others felt that these programs did not go far enough.

The current “equity” lens considered by the BCUC tends to be financial in nature only. Some thought that this was an issue, while others felt that equity programming and direction should come from the provincial government, not the BCUC. The BCUC currently considers the concept of “fairness” at the commissioners’ discretion – to expand from here would require a common definition of equity, and regulated utilities are in conflict on this.

Participants also noted that utility regulation fails to account for the societal costs of unhealthy housing and inadequate heating and cooling,

the social costs of GHG emissions, and the future costs of stranded assets. Most agreed utilities and all public decision makers should require equity, climate, and resilience considerations, while noting the need to balance these requirements with the political independence of the BCUC.

Question 2: Decarbonization & Electrification Alignment with Energy Justice

As efforts to reduce emissions backslide and become more politicized, is decarbonization still a core goal of energy justice work?

How can decarbonization and electrification efforts be more explicitly aligned with climate resilience and adaptation for vulnerable populations?

Some participants noted that different communities have varying conceptions and visions of energy justice, which makes this question difficult to answer. Some communities prioritize housing, jobs, or affordability over concerns like decarbonization, public health, and climate resilience. They acknowledged that decarbonization has become less of a priority for many communities and decision-makers.

Global climate action has stalled, while adaptation messaging (such as providing cooling) has taken centre stage. They agreed that successful communication requires framing tailored to the needs of the specific audience and community.

Question 3: Energy Efficiency/ Electrification and Housing Affordability

As Canada's housing and affordability crisis deepens, is energy efficiency and electrification still an equity-aligned priority for new housing? If so, how can we avoid backsliding?

Participants felt that energy efficiency and electrification in new housing are still important ways to encourage energy justice, health, affordability, and comfort. Many of the participants noted the importance of building right the first time as key to affordability. They identified climate vs. affordability narratives as a false choice that creates higher costs. Other participants emphasized the importance of building envelope improvements to reduce costs and the need to enhance heat pump maintenance capacity.

Several attendees noted that justice issues are always political and that backsliding is a risk. Participants identified the many barriers to balancing the housing and affordability crisis with energy justice, and discussed several backsliding risks in the current political context. Barriers take many forms, from the affordability of fossil gas compared to electricity, to a housing market where developer profit is the dominant motivation in decision-making around housing.

Several specific strategies for addressing backsliding were brought up in the discussion. Participants suggested that Canada should develop its own ENERGY STAR rating system as the U.S. climate policy backslides. They also recommended mandating higher levels of the BC Energy Step Code and Zero Carbon Step Code, providing more incentives for building envelope improvement, and exploring degrowth models that reduce energy and material consumption.

Energy efficiency and electrification in new housing are still important ways to encourage energy justice, health, affordability, and comfort.

Question 4: Community vs individual scale

Are community-scale decarbonization efforts still a feasible goal, or should our focus return to programs and policies that target individual households?

Participants supported both decarbonization pathways – those targeting individual homes as well as scaled approaches. Participants identified strategies for promoting community-scale decarbonization, including a cohort approach utilizing community energy champions, targeting locations that are most ready for electrification, involving organizations such as Youth Climate Corps to install projects and retrofit buildings, DIY kits to help communities build capacity and take action together, and redirecting fossil fuel subsidies to building retrofits.

Other opportunities participants mentioned included creating a retrofit Crown corporation, expanding thermal energy networks (TENS), deploying prefabricated homes, and project aggregation to increase economies of scale. All strategies will require strong resident engagement and buy-in and can only move at the speed of trust.



Closing Session: Call to Action

The final session of the day was a call to action from panelists embedded in justice and activism work. This final panel placed the energy and climate-focused sessions earlier in the day within the context of the larger issues of housing affordability, availability, and adequacy. Participants heard from community advocates, organizers, and those with lived and living experience of energy insecurity or unhealthy homes, leaving attendees with a renewed sense of the importance of this work and how they can contribute.

Panelists:

Yasmin Abraham, President and Co-Founder, Kambo Energy Group

Rowan Burdge, Executive Director, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

Margaret Wanyoike, Advocate, CAN Leaders Network

Emily Armitage, Lead Organizer, BC ACORN

Moderator: Jofri Issac, Researcher, Royal Roads University

Ecotrust Canada's Energy team is taking what we learned from the Home Energy Justice Forum and using it to better inform our ongoing policy and research work in BC. We invite all Forum participants, as well as others reading this report, to apply the themes and learnings from the Forum to their own work as well.



“Coming up with solutions that have input from these different areas can be really transformative and important and give people the opportunity to bring leadership back to their area of focus and sphere of influence.”

– Rowan Burdge, Executive Director, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition



Conclusion

The 2025 Home Energy Justice Forum demonstrated the power of bringing together diverse voices – from community advocates and Indigenous leaders to government officials and energy sector professionals – to address one of BC’s most pressing challenges: ensuring all residents have access to safe, affordable, and healthy homes.

Over 110 participants united around a shared vision that energy security is achievable when households can access essential energy services without hardship, live in comfortable homes with affordable bills, and use efficient, resilient, low-carbon energy sources. The Forum’s discussions revealed both the urgency of the crisis, with over 250,000 BC households experiencing energy insecurity, and the pathways forward.

Collaborative Action in Motion

Following the Forum, participants have translated discussions into concrete action. In June 2025, Ecotrust Canada and several aligned signatory organizations delivered a letter to BC Hydro and the BC Government calling for more robust financial support for homes switching from electric baseboard heating to heat pumps – a direct response to Forum discussions about removing barriers to beneficial electrification.

The Forum also strengthened networks and partnerships that will drive future progress.

Municipal representatives returned to their communities with new tools for advancing thermal safety regulations, while Indigenous communities gained additional support for their leadership in demonstrating equitable decarbonization pathways.

Looking Forward

As we face an increasingly challenging political context for climate action, the Forum demonstrated that framing solutions around immediate community needs – health, affordability, safety – creates broader support for the systemic changes required. This approach centres human dignity and community agency while achieving critical climate and energy goals.

Ecotrust Canada’s Energy team continues to activate the participant network established through this Forum, supporting the key policy and program changes identified in our Next Steps. We invite all Forum participants, and others inspired by this work, to carry these insights forward in their own communities and organizations.

The path to energy justice is clear: it requires centering community voices, protecting the most vulnerable, and building systems that serve people rather than profit. The 2025 Home Energy Justice Forum showed that when diverse stakeholders unite around this vision, transformative change becomes possible.



Appendix: Speaker Biographies

In order of appearance



Squamish Nation Elder Xele'milh-Doris Paul

Doris - Xelemilh is a member of the Squamish Nation located on the North Shore. Her mom is/was Squamish Nation and her late father is/was Sechelt Nation, she honours both nations and calls both home.

Doris is a Residential School Survivor and is also the product of Residential School. She attended the Sechelt Indian Residential School from 1962 –1973, which both her parents attended Sechelt as well. Through the horrendous life experiences of being raised in Residential School, she has managed to utilize her experience as a learning tool to help service providers understand the suffering and pain of First Nations people.

Awards of recognition for her community work and cultural navigations include the King Charles III Coronation Award 2024, BC Reconciliation Award 2022, BC Lions Be More Than a Bystander Award 2018, BC Community Achievement Award 2007, North Vancouver City-Heart of the Community Award 2007, and MADD Mothers Canada- Community Safety Award.



Dylan Heerema, Senior Policy Advisor, Ecotrust Canada

Dylan Heerema is a policy and technical expert with a passion for energy justice and community resilience. Originally from Treaty 7 Territory in the Alberta foothills, a strong connection to the coast brought Dylan to BC and Tla'amin Nation Territory, where he works on energy efficiency, diesel reduction, and renewable energy initiatives for rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Canada.

Dylan is a Professional Engineer and Energy Advisor, with a M.Eng. in Clean Energy Engineering from the University of British Columbia. Over the past decade, he has worked extensively with governments, communities, industry, and NGOs on climate and energy policy. Dylan also brings experience in the utility planning and regulatory process to Ecotrust Canada's Community Energy team, which he joined in 2019.



Josephine Schrott, Sr. Program Manager & Policy Analyst, Ecotrust Canada

As an Analyst for Ecotrust Canada's Community Energy Program, Josephine Schrott works towards policies enabling health, resilience, energy efficiency, and decarbonization in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. She has nine years of experience working towards sustainable communities using her skills in research, project management, and operations. In addition to policy research and advocacy, she has completed multiple community energy feasibility studies and leads Ecotrust Canada's retrofit programming in coastal BC.

Josephine completed a master's degree in Comparative Law, Economics, and Finance at the International University College of Turin in Italy, a BA in International Relations at UBC, and the Practical Energy and Advanced Knowledge – Buildings Certificate at Douglas College.



Betsy Agar, Buildings Director, Efficiency Canada

Having been licensed in Ontario as a building science engineer before building science was cool, Betsy Agar has drawn on her technical background advocating for building decarbonization and adaptation over the last 10+ years. Born and raised in Ontario, she moved her family to North Vancouver nearly 15 years ago and now calls both provinces home. Betsy is grateful for the privilege of living, working and playing on the unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples.



Dr. Michael Schwandt, Medical Health Officer with Vancouver Coastal Health and a Clinical Associate Professor in the UBC School of Population and Public Health

Dr. Schwandt (he/him) provides regional public health leadership in areas including healthy built environments, climate change adaptation and emergency preparedness. Dr. Schwandt works with health system partners, researchers, government, and community-based organizations to protect and promote health at the population level, with attention to equity and the root causes of illness and wellness.



Leya Behra, Deputy Director, Climate Action, City of New Westminster

Leya Behra is a professional engineer and dedicated leader in climate action and energy management, passionate about people and the planet. With over 20 years in a career spanning clean technology development, industrial energy management, energy utility consulting and now local government, she has worked to advance clean energy solutions that center equity and impact.

As Deputy Director of Climate Action at the City of New Westminster, Leya integrates climate policy with utility operations, leading demand-side management (DSM) and electrification initiatives. Guided by a deep commitment to climate justice, she believes people are at the heart of every decision, working to build a more sustainable and equitable future for all.



Lisa Westerhoff, Principal Owner, Westerhoff Climate Strategies

As principal owner and founder of Westerhoff Climate Strategies, Lisa Westerhoff is recognized in British Columbia and across Canada as a focused, reliable leader in building decarbonization policy and interest holder engagement. With over 10 years of industry experience, Lisa works with local governments, universities, developers, and industry organizations to create policies and strategies for a healthy, low-carbon and resilient built environment.

Lisa thrives when bringing together interested and affected parties from across sectors and weaving multiple perspectives to create clear, transparent and well-founded policy decisions that speak to a range of audiences. She holds a PhD in urban sustainability from UBC and is the author of several academic publications on strategies for increasing climate change resilience and energy and emissions reductions. She also holds a master's degree in climate change resilience and adaptation and was the winner of the Canada Green Building Council's Green Building Champion Award in 2019.



Robert Patterson, Staff Lawyer, Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre

Robert Patterson (he/him) is a lawyer and tenant advocate at the Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC), a non-profit organization that provides free legal education, representation, and advocacy on residential tenancy matters.



**Jessica McIlroy, Buildings Program Manager,
Pembina Institute**

Jessica McIlroy is passionate about driving change to realize social and climate justice. With twenty years of experience in clean energy and climate action, she is continually looking for and creating opportunities to change policy, behaviour, and industry practices. Jessica is a manager with the buildings team at the Pembina Institute, a national clean energy think tank, and an elected councillor with the City of North Vancouver.

She currently sits on the Lonsdale Energy Corporation Board of Directors, the Metro Vancouver Indigenous Relations Committee, the BC Municipal Climate Leadership Council and the Climate Caucus board of directors. Jessica has held leadership positions with Climate Reality Project Canada, BC Sustainable Energy Association, Passive House Canada, and Marine Renewables Canada, and holds a BSc and MSc in environmental science and an MBA.



Robyn Ashwell, Researcher, Ecotrust Canada

Robyn Ashwell (she/her) is leading an Ecotrust Canada research project on the barriers and opportunities for improving energy security, comfort and health with home retrofits in manufactured home parks. While the potential for saving energy and enhancing quality of life is huge in manufactured homes, residents often face both familiar and unique challenges, including the ownership model of parks. Robyn's research highlights the support and advocacy that manufactured home and park owners need, and it also illustrates how extensively social, economic and environmental issues – and their solutions – are intertwined.

Robyn is also an entrepreneur, facilitator, adventurer and parent. She is a director of Sea to Sky Outdoor School for Sustainability Education, a co-founder of Shift Delivery Coop, and she studied Political Science, Sustainable Community Development, and Dialogue at Simon Fraser University.



Chris Higgins, Senior Green Building Planner, City of Vancouver

Chris Higgins develops and implements building bylaw, policy, and incentive programs to achieve new buildings that run without fossil fuels, while at the same time helping to reduce greenhouse gases from existing homes. He works to remove barriers to existing home retrofits, and possesses an understanding of regulatory and incentive options a city has at its disposal. Chris is a spokesperson at national conferences and to various media outlets.

Chris worked for the Canada Green Building Council from 2008-2014, developed the LEED Canada for Homes program for single along with multifamily homes and supported its delivery in all provinces and two territories. Chris has served on the board of directors for Passive House Canada. Chris is a Newfoundlander but has made British Columbia his home for the last two decades.



Mariko Michasiw, Program Manager, Building to Electrification Coalition (B2E)

Mariko Michasiw is a Certified Energy Manager with over a decade of experience planning and implementing energy-efficiency and decarbonization projects. She leverages her extensive experience and in-depth understanding of real-life challenges related to commercial and residential building electrification to effectively lead Canada's first building electrification coalition, B2E. As the Program Manager of B2E, Mariko works closely with coalition members to advance effective building decarbonization through electrification.

Through strategic management and strong industry engagement, she continues to grow and diversify the network while effectively adapting programming to the evolving market conditions. Through the broad coalition, members work together to reduce BC's building sector climate impacts, move away from the reliance on fossil fuels, and improve resilience to changing climate conditions.



**Kayla Fayant, Energy Advisor Program Manager,
Indigenous Clean Energy**

Kayla Fayant (she/her) is the Indigenous Clean Energy (ICE) Regional Energy Coach supporting Indigenous and Northern Communities. Kayla is a Metis woman from Fishing Lake Metis Settlement and in her time working in her home community, she gained interest in clean energy, energy efficiency, and housing.

She joined the Bringing it Home team at ICE three years ago and has been supporting Indigenous communities' participation in the energy efficiency space since through ICE's Regional Energy Advisor Training program, curriculum and resource development, the Healthy Energy Homes project, and supporting other ICE programs.



Jofri Issac, Researcher, Royal Roads University

Jofri Issac is a researcher at Royal Roads University and a recent Master of Arts graduate in environment and management. His research focuses on systems mapping of socio-ecological issues, with an emphasis on food systems, energy poverty, and energy transitions in social housing, particularly examining the intersections of governance and policy. Issac applies a systems lens and uses participatory approaches to integrate community perspectives and generate actionable qualitative insights.



Yasmin Abraham, President and Co-Founder, Kambo Energy Group

Yasmin Abraham is President and Co-Founder of Kambo Energy Group, a social enterprise that reduces energy poverty and improves housing in communities that have historically been underprioritized across Canada and the Pacific Northwest. For over 15 years Kambo has supported communities through its three flagship programs each designed to address a unique gap in the market: Empower Me, an education and awareness program designed to support environmental justice communities; the Home Upgrades Program, Canada's first community-led retrofit program to reduce energy poverty, and Community Power which works with Tribal and First Nations to take action on housing.

Yasmin is a leading expert in equity-based energy and climate programming, working with governments and utilities across North America to design and deliver inclusive solutions. Yasmin has assembled an employee roster representative of the communities they serve – 83% identify as visible minority, immigrant and/or multilingual, and 59% of employees are female.



Rowan Burdge, Executive Director, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

Rowan Burdge (she/they) is the Provincial Director of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition. Rowan is a disabled, queer, white settler living on the unceded, stolen lands of the x^wməθk^wi'yəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) nations. Rowan is an advocate and organizer working towards poverty eradication alongside marginalized communities across BC.

Rowan has 15+ years of experience in nonprofits, including many years working in shelters in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in harm reduction programs. They have a master's degree in Equity Studies in Education focusing on radical inclusion for disabled students in higher education. Outside of work, Rowan loves to roller skate, play on their queer dodgeball and softball teams, and advocate for fair pharmacare and disability justice.



Margaret Wanyoike, Advocate, CAN Leaders Network

Margaret Wanyoike (she/her) is a spirited advocate for affordable housing and anti-racism education in New Westminster, the unceded and unsundered land of the Halkomelem-speaking peoples. She was inspired to get involved in community work to raise the voices of people with lived experiences of poverty and instability.

Since graduating from a New Westminster CAN cohort, Margaret has immersed herself in a variety of opportunities to be involved in her community. Facilitating webinars and community meetings, liaising with the New Westminster school district regarding anti-black racism, and representing the voices of newcomers, renters, and those who have experienced poverty on a municipal Advisory Committee are just a few of the many ways Margaret has shown leadership in her community.

Margaret is seen as a bastion of knowledge in New Westminster, often spending her time helping folks navigate community services, either informally or through the Community Resource Team at the New Westminster Library. In her personal time, she enjoys swimming, going for walks, and singing. She is available to connect in English, Kikuyu, and Swahili.



Emily Armitage, Lead Organizer, BC ACORN



Melina Scholefield, Executive Director, Zero Emissions Innovation Centre

Melina Scholefield is a professional engineer with over two decades of public and private sector experience. She has a long-standing dedication to sustainability, innovation, leadership development and collaboration across sectors and disciplines. In the private sector, Melina worked as a green building project consultant and a Built Green certified residential builder with a special interest in passive house methods.

In the public sector, Melina has held leadership roles with the City of Vancouver related to sustainability, climate mitigation and adaptation, green building policy, green Infrastructure planning and implementation and transportation planning. Most recently, Melina and her team led Vancouver's ambitious and multi-award-winning Rain City Strategy, a transformative, cross-departmental urban rainwater management initiative.



Vancouver Office

225 West 8th Avenue, Suite #300
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1N3

Prince Rupert Office

425-309 Second Avenue West
Prince Rupert, BC V8J 3T1

ecotrust.ca