

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Excerpted from Special Report No. 54 (Pages 139-144)

Fairness in a changing climate: Ensuring disaster supports are accessible, equitable and adaptable

FINDINGS	
EMERGENCY SUPPORT SERVICES	
F1	Emergency Management BC did not have a comprehensive framework for collecting and analyzing data about evacuated households that received emergency supports in 2021, which was an unreasonable procedure under section 23(1)(a)(v) of the <i>Ombudsperson Act</i> .
F2	The way in which Emergency Support Services were delivered in response to wildfires and the atmospheric river in 2021 was an unfair procedure under section 23(1)(a)(v) of the <i>Ombudsperson Act</i> because the program did not adequately account for existing vulnerabilities among people who were trying to access the services. As a result, people experienced inequitable access and outcomes based on factors including Indigeneity, physical ability, health, age, family status and income.
F3	Emergency Support Services responders did not receive adequate support from Emergency Management BC in conducting fair, consistent and efficient assessments of whether evacuees' insurance was reasonably and readily available during the wildfires and atmospheric river event in 2021, which was an unfair procedure under section 23(1)(a)(v) of the <i>Ombudsperson Act</i> .
F4	Emergency Management BC did not establish clear measures of accountability and oversight for the contracted provision of long-term Emergency Support Services, which was an unfair procedure under section 23(1)(a)(v) of the <i>Ombudsperson Act</i> .
DISASTER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	
F5	Emergency Management BC's processing of private sector Disaster Financial Assistance constituted unreasonable delay under section 23(1)(c) of the <i>Ombudsperson Act</i> because it did not have sufficient staffing to respond fairly and in a timely manner to applications and appeals related to the atmospheric river events, and the appeals process was not meaningfully available to applicants for almost a year after the events.
F6	Emergency Management BC did not communicate effectively with or provide adequate information, including clear reasons for decision-making, to private sector Disaster Financial Assistance applicants, which was an unfair procedure under section 23(1)(a)(v) of the <i>Ombudsperson Act</i> .
F7	Emergency Management BC's decision not to respond or provide updates to applicants with pending Disaster Financial Assistance appeals was an unreasonable procedure under section 23(1)(a)(v) of the <i>Ombudsperson Act</i> .

F8

In relation to the 2021 atmospheric river, Emergency Management BC did not consider and plan for the disproportionate impacts of disasters on socially marginalized populations and equity-entitled groups in developing and applying Disaster Financial Assistance policies and procedures, an omission that was an unreasonable procedure under section 23(1)(a)(v) of the *Ombudsperson Act*.

LOOKING AHEAD: FAIRNESS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

F9

The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness does not have adequate provincial plans and resources in place to meet the needs of people experiencing the impacts of extreme weather and to respond to long-term displacement. This is an unreasonable procedure under section 23(1)(a)(v) of the *Ombudsperson Act*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EMERGENCY SUPPORT SERVICES

R1

The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with local authorities and First Nations to evaluate the adequacy of training, financial and technical support provided to local authorities and First Nations to transition to the Evacuee Registration and Assistance (ERA) tool by December 31, 2024, and provide additional assistance, as necessary to achieve the successful onboarding of every eligible local authority and First Nation to ERA by March 31, 2026.

R2

The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with local authorities and First Nations to, by December 31, 2026, develop and implement a process to support the collection of socio-demographic data on Emergency Support Services consistent with the requirements of the *Anti-Racism Data Act*.

R3

The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with First Nations, First Nations' Emergency Services Society, Métis Nation British Columbia, the First Nations Health Authority and other Indigenous partners to integrate cultural safety across the entire Emergency Support Services system, including developing and implementing a process for receiving meaningful and timely feedback about cultural safety in the delivery of Emergency Support Services by December 31, 2025, and for ensuring that timely program and policy changes are made in response to that feedback.

R4	<p>The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with local authorities and First Nations to strengthen provincial support and resources for the delivery of local Emergency Support Services, including the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement effective surge support for large-scale Emergency Support Services responses, including consideration of expanded use of “as and when” employees by May 31, 2024. Develop a framework that supports flexibility and resilience in local delivery of Emergency Support Services, including a review of cost recovery for Emergency Support Services work by local authority and First Nations staff by May 31, 2025. Develop and implement a strategy for improved communications to evacuees about Emergency Support Services, including a centralized communications website for providing information to evacuees by May 31, 2024. Develop a program for more meaningful provincial recognition of the important contributions made by local Emergency Support Services volunteers by May 31, 2024.
R5	<p>By December 31, 2026, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness take steps necessary to ensure that reception centres are accessible, including working with local authorities and First Nations to identify reception centre sites that are already accessible and, as necessary, improving accessibility by developing standards, conducting accessibility audits, and providing funding to address any identified deficiencies and meet any accessibility standards.</p>
R6	<p>The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with local authorities and First Nations to, by May 31, 2024, increase daily billet rates and broaden lodging options for evacuees, including those with larger households, people with complex health needs and people with pets.</p>
R7	<p>The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with local authorities and First Nations to, by May 31, 2024, implement alternate ways for evacuees to access Emergency Support Services if they are unable to attend a reception centre in person.</p>
R8	<p>Consistent with its mandate to coordinate evacuee supports, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with other ministries, health authorities, First Nations and local authorities to, by December 31, 2024, develop and implement a strategy, with appropriate funding, to further integrate disaster psychosocial first aid, professional mental health care and social work into the delivery of Emergency Support Services.</p>

R9	The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with local authorities and First Nations to develop and implement a policy that supports multiple options for accessing Emergency Support Services, that do not rely on the use of vouchers, when e-transfer is not available or appropriate. The policy to be in place by May 31, 2024.
R10	The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with local authorities, First Nations and Métis Nation British Columbia to develop and implement by December 31, 2025, a timely, accessible and culturally safe complaints process that can be used by people who are trying to access, or who have accessed, Emergency Support Services.
R11	The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with local authorities and First Nations to, by May 31, 2024, implement a policy and other supports that will assist Emergency Support Services responders in making fair, consistent and efficient determinations of whether insurance is readily and reasonably available in the context of an Emergency Support Services needs assessment. As risks and costs increase with the impacts of climate change, needs assessments should include the affordability of insurance and insurance deductibles in the determination of whether an evacuee's insurance is readily and reasonably available to them.
R12	Effective immediately, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness ensure that any future contracts initiated by the province for delivery of Emergency Support Services require a comprehensive reporting back to the province and affected First Nations and local authorities, including information about the households that received emergency supports and the amount and nature of the support provided by the third-party contractor.
DISASTER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	
R13	By September 30, 2024, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness develop, implement, and communicate effective service standards for timely processing of Disaster Financial Assistance applications and appeals, and ensure it has the staff complement necessary to meet those standards.
R14	The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness review its communications about the Disaster Financial Assistance program with a view to identifying ways in which the program can be better communicated to people who might need it and by May 31, 2024, implement those changes.
R15	Effective immediately, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness communicate status updates to applicants with pending Disaster Financial Assistance applications and appeals, and by September 30, 2024, implement improved communications with and guidance to applicants throughout the application and decision-making process, including appeals.

R16	Effective immediately, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness apply a GBA+ and IGBA+ lens in reviewing, revising, and developing Disaster Financial Assistance policies with full implementation of policy changes by September 30, 2025.
R17	By September 30, 2025, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness develop and implement a process to improve the collection of socio-demographic data on Disaster Financial Assistance to support equitable service delivery, consistent with the requirements of the <i>Anti-Racism Data Act</i> .
LOOKING AHEAD: FAIRNESS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE	
R18	<p>The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness develop plans and a policy framework to meet the needs of people experiencing long-term displacement, considering the impacts of climate change and how people-centred programs might better support climate change adaptation and future resilience, by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> consulting broadly with the public by December 31, 2024, on modernization of Emergency Support Services and Disaster Financial Assistance as related components of disaster recovery, working with local authorities and First Nations, and across government, to develop and implement by September 30, 2025, integrated plans and policies to support people who experience long-term displacement due to disasters and that are consistent with the principles of administrative fairness, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the <i>Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act</i>.
R19	By June 30, 2024, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness develop and implement public communications that reflect the current impacts of insurance on the availability of financial supports for disaster response and recovery, and by June 30, 2025, develop a policy and process to reassess insurance availability in BC as risks increase with the impacts of climate change, and a national flood insurance program is implemented.
R20	The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness work with Indigenous governing bodies to advance Indigenous self-determination in emergency management including by prioritizing capacity building for Indigenous-led emergency response and recovery and ensuring consistent, appropriate funding for Indigenous communities and organizations. The ministry report on specific actions taken as part of its Declaration Act Annual Report for the duration of the 2022-2027 Action Plan.