



National Collaborating Centre
for Environmental Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
en santé environnementale

‘Right to Cool’: Transforming protection for priority populations from extreme temperatures

Thursday May 30, 2024 | 12:00pm-1:00pm PT
Liv Yoon, PhD



Presentation Outline

- Context & Approach to Issue
- Part I: Improving Extreme Temperature Centre Access and Experience
 - Project overview
 - Housed service users
 - Unhoused service users
 - Service providers
 - ‘So what?’ + ‘Sticky’ points
- Part II: Contextualizing this in ‘Right to Cool’

Hopes for presentation:

- ☐ Actionable recommendations
- ☐ Contextualize cooling centres under ‘right to cool’
- ☐ Provoke thought about how ‘right to cool’ can advance more justice and healthier / more equitable communities?

What initiatives, programs or ideas come to your mind when you hear 'Right to Cool'?

Menti.com – 3250 7657



Setting the scene

- Heat (EHE and general) increasing in intensity, frequency, duration
- Resources available, but underutilized in Metro Vancouver
- Seniors and others facing marginalization and injustices disproportionately impacted
- Different 'right to cool' initiatives popping up

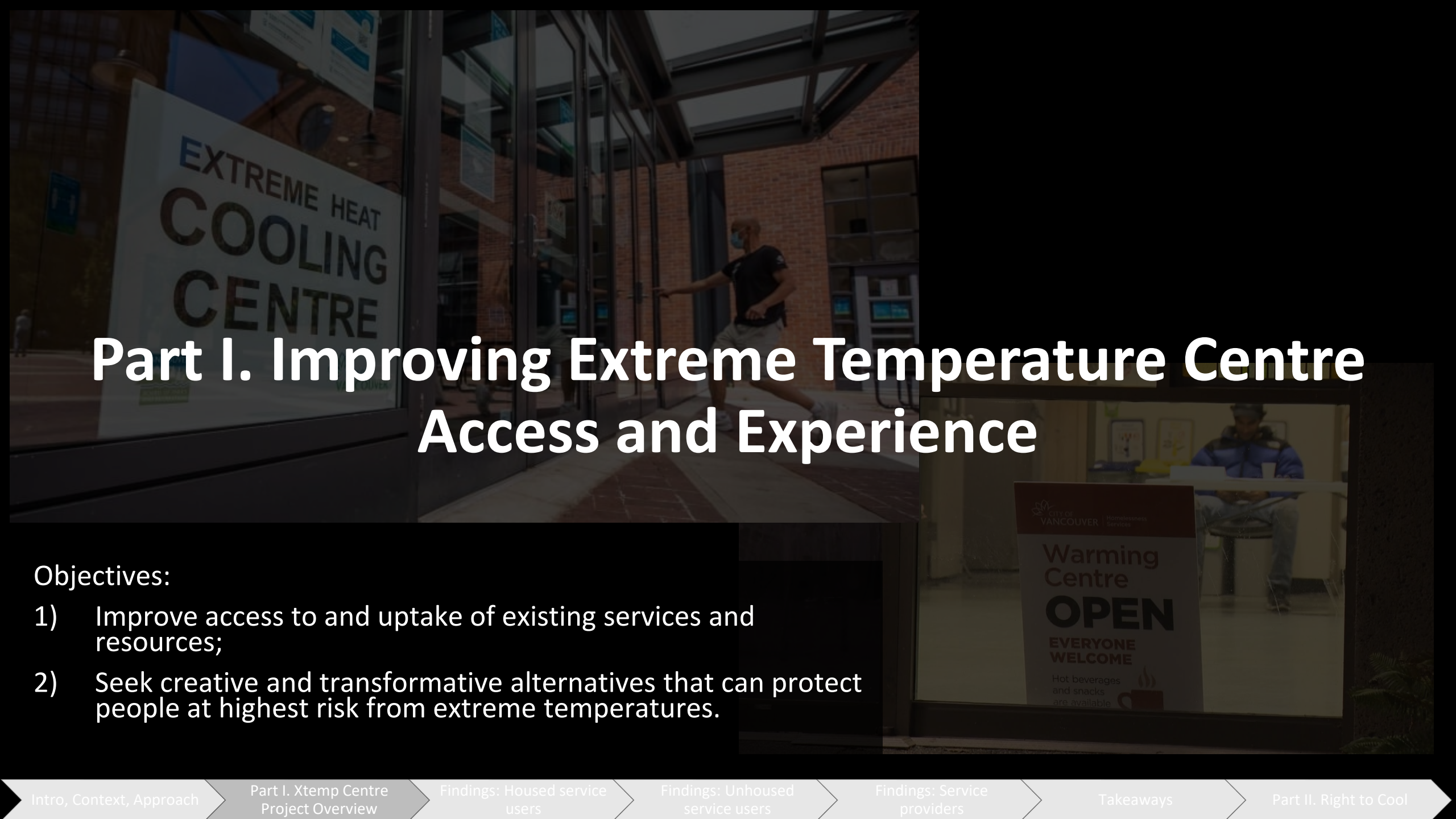
[video](#)



Approach to issue



- About a lot more than cooling/warming centres
- Social science / SDOH / EDOH-approach focused on social inequities
- Underlined with finding opportunity in complexity – to ‘undo and rebuild’ towards good health and dignity for all



Part I. Improving Extreme Temperature Centre Access and Experience

Objectives:

- 1) Improve access to and uptake of existing services and resources;
- 2) Seek creative and transformative alternatives that can protect people at highest risk from extreme temperatures.

What project is this discussion based on?

- Title: 'An Intersectoral and Community-based Participatory Research Approach to Transforming Protection for Priority Populations from Extreme Temperatures'
- UBC Project Team: Giulia Belotti, Shruti Chakravarty, Nicole Chin, Chaimae Chouiekh, Thanh Le, Lam Liu, Aida Mohajeri, Eduardo Rosales, Erika Siao, Aneesha Sran, Rachel Stern, Ashley Wan, Katherine White, Michelle Yeung
- PI: Liv Yoon (UBC);
Co-PIs: Chris Buse (SFU), Eun-Young Lee (Queen's University), Jeff Masuda (UVic)
- Knowledge Users: Sarah Henderson, Alexis Crabtree (BC CDC), Jonathan Carroll (BC MOH), Michael Schwandt (VCH), Emily Newhouse (FHA)

- Funders:
 Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada
 PICS
PACIFIC INSTITUTE FOR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Cooling/warming centres are far from a perfect nor long-term solution...

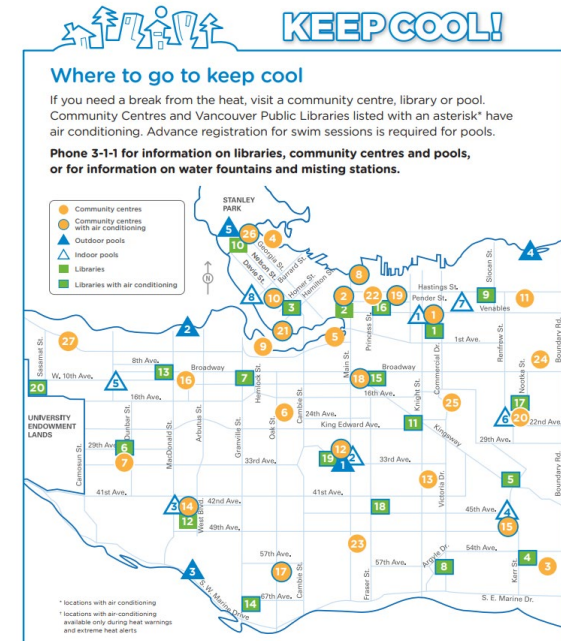
People who are most vulnerable to extreme temperatures should be comfortable and safe in their own homes.

BUT

These services serve as the urgent, temporary fix that we need because people are dying now.

What do we know already?

- Many response plans exist already: conventional warming/cooling shelters + efforts to leverage existing facilities and resources.
- However, these services in BC are underutilized, and their overall effectiveness is not thoroughly understood.
- Most existing qualitative analyses of user experiences of extreme temperature services are based outside of Canada.
- To date, only a limited number of qualitative inquiries in the Canadian context.
- Following the 2021 Western Heat Dome, a [survey with service providers](#) revealed some perceived barriers: lack of awareness; inability to bring a pet; stigma; distrust of authority; and lack of staff training.



Winter Shelters & Warming Centres 2023 - 2024

CITY OF VANCOUVER | Arts, Culture and Community Services



Find a shelter space:
shelters.bc.211.ca
Call: 2-1-1



See if Extreme Weather
Response Shelters are open:
vancouver.ca/files/cov/
vancouver-ewr.pdf

For more information and support
accessing shelter, contact:

Carnegie Outreach

- 604-665-3318
- carnegie.outreach@vancouver.ca
- Visit the office:
392 Powell Street
Monday - Friday, 9am-4pm

Visit a Daytime Service Centre:

- Carnegie Centre
- Evelyn Saller Centre
- Gathering Place



What did we do?



Service Users	Service Providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• South Vancouver Neighbourhood House• South Vancouver Seniors Network• Yarrow Intergenerational Society for Justice• Elizabeth Fry Society (EFry)• Engaged Communities Canada Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Westminster Public Library• City of Port Moody• City of White Rock• Richmond Public Library• EFry branch in Surrey

- Interviews and focus groups with service users* (n=60) and providers (n=9) from Oct '23 - Feb '24
- **service users* = users + *potential* users | VARIOUS LEVELS OF VULNERABILITY**
- Interviews & Focus groups in Cantonese, English, Farsi, Mandarin, Spanish, Vietnamese



Knowledge Exchange: Extreme Temperature Services and 'Right to Cool'

Friday May 31, 2024 | 1:00pm-3:30pm
at South Vancouver Neighbourhood House



What we heard:

Barriers to Access for Housed Service Users

1. Infrastructure

2. Operational details

3. Concerns and perceptions

What we heard:

Barriers to Access for Housed Service Users

1. infrastructure

- Transportation and mobility issues
 - Transit-related challenges
 - Challenges for those mobility-impaired
- Geographical disparity in facility distribution
 - Too far
 - Not enough facilities in some neighborhoods

"We'd have to wait for the bus to come, [but] we don't know when the bus will come, right? We also need to wait for the transfers and it's too hot"

"I think there are not many shelters, right? And they're too far, it's not suitable"

What we heard:

Barriers to Access for Housed Service Users

"[I go] because that's the nearest to my house. I feel very, very safe there. [...] I cannot be standing for two hours. That's the only problem. Sometimes I can even go to the washroom where they have seats, you know, but I think they are not too well equipped [for lots of] seniors at one go."

2. Operational details

- Lack of info
 - Location, purpose
 - Language barriers
 - Unclear instructions
- Lack of activities / not conducive to socializing
- Lack of seating
- Hours of operation as an obstacle
 - Night time!

"If you can't speak English, you basically can't get into the shelter. The language spoken there is all English"

"Especially in the summertime, places that close at 9 o'clock... That's when the heat hits you! You've gotta have places open!"

What we heard:

Barriers to Access for Housed Service Users

"The key factor is ensuring a sense of security (...) Personally, I have experienced situations where I took one look and immediately turned away"

"You can't just herd people together in a room and say 'there, we can cool you all down'. (...) they put me between two people who are coughing like mad. And not wearing masks"

"These community centres are for people on the streets, homeless people. They're not very safe"

3. Concerns and perceptions

- Safety concerns
 - Stigma, fear of violence
 - Hygiene concerns
 - Fear of getting sick
- Many perceived Xtemp centres associated with unhoused individuals
- Existing perception of government/authority organizations

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3. Concerns and perceptions

- Safety concerns
 - Stigma, fear of violence
 - Hygiene concerns
 - Fear of getting sick
- Not perceived as necessary for housed individuals
 - Xtemp centres associated with unhoused folks
- Existing perception of government/authority organizations

Instead...



‘Leave your home’ guidance by B.C. PHSA prompts response from disability, seniors advocates

- Most use both **existing public and private spaces** when needed (e.g., malls, grocery stores, pools, parks) rather than explicit cooling / warming centres
 - Preference for places they are already familiar with, with culturally specific activities
- Many prefer their home (even when clearly insufficient)
 - Employ fans, A/C (if available), cold showers, ice packs



- In other words, if these familiar places are not convenient to access, many people would rather suffer at home than seek a cooling centre
- However, many homes have poor indoor environmental quality
- Many tenants do not have control over their indoor environments and are subject to decisions of building managers and landlords

"My neighbor had an argument with our building manager about this. They said there's no solution; the pipes are aging, and they can't do anything for it. The manager even said, 'If you don't like it, you can leave, find another place to live.' So we thought, buying a heater ourselves is the only way to solve the problem."

What we heard:

Barriers to Access for **Unhoused** Service Users

“My experience at the extreme temperature shelter is so so. Staff are kinda rude and they are always after me about my belongings. They expect me to leave it outside. Easy for them they don’t have their entire world to carry around.”

Many find public spaces to be “hostile spaces”

Lack of space

“To make shelters more appealing, they could offer more services like job training or mental health support in addition to just shelter and food. I need a job but I don’t need other things like drug counseling.”

Marginalization written upon their bodies, legible in public spaces;
→ people expelled from places

“Intense gentrification & social cleansing” – fewer and fewer places for people to seek refuge outdoors

No more to say except we need more spaces and places where we are welcome.

Saleem



I used to work as a janitor before things took a turn. I've been staying at the shelter for about 4 months now. Before that, I was sleeping on the streets.

I usually find out about excessive heat or cold warnings from the shelter staff or other homeless individuals where I am staying.

Extreme temperatures have affected my health negatively, especially during the winter. I've had frostbite before (shows fingers on left hand), and it's not very good and now this finger doesn't curl.

I haven't used extreme temperature shelters because I'm not always aware of their locations and transportation can be a barrier for me. They're often overcrowded, and sometimes I feel safer staying outside.

Providing transportation services to get to shelters would be helpful and a space to store their belongings safely.

Travis

Yes, I'm aware of extreme temperature shelters and I use them a lot. Other homeless people tell me. One time bylaw told me when they saw me freezing in my tent.

Heat not so bad I can manage but this cold is a killer.

My experience is always positive. I get racism thrown at me a lot but I don't care. Just need safety so I keep going. Even the staff are racist but I just keep my mouth shut so I don't get banned.

How about a private bed or some kind of partition even? That would be nice. And wish they wake you gently instead of yelling and turning on the lights all of a sudden.

No more to say except we need more spaces and places where we are welcome.



Mahmood



I used to work in construction, but after an injury when I was 50 things got tough and I have been like this. These crutches are new and only because the cold made me fall and I hurt my hip.

I found out about weather spaces at the McDonald's from a homeless person. During heatwaves I slept under a tree like I did as a boy in Iran and in cold weather I go around asking for spaces. I have respiratory issues and difficulty sleeping especially when it's cold.

My experience at the extreme temperature shelter was positive overall. I mainly went there for food, warmth and to be social with other people because I am really alone most of the time.

To make shelters more appealing, can you ask them to **provide more resources for finding stable housing and job opportunities?** Also for old people like me on crutches **I need help moving.**

I am so thankful you are asking me these questions people stop caring what I think when I am useless to the world so to be asked is so nice and maybe that will help other people.

What we heard: **Service Providers'** Experiences

Challenges:

- Uncertainty surrounding when services will be operational
 - Challenging for service users to navigate (e.g., when will services be available?).
 - Complexities ensuring adequate staffing and difficulties with inconsistent work hours for staff.
- Contending with individuals (shelter guests or members of the public) that are rude, aggressive, discriminatory.
- Unable to meet broader SDOH needs of users that are demanded:

“There are limitations as to the services we can provide at our site and thus we cannot always fulfill or meet the needs/requests of our shelter guests (such as a securing stable and affordable housing, or securing ID).”

What we heard: **Service Providers'** Experiences

Needs:

- Larger site with regular shower and laundry service, storage for personal belongings for guests
- A place to smoke and use, or at least a safe, supervised consumption site nearby
- Have more health and social workers available on site
- Legal aid / low-barrier access to legal services for our shelter guests.

Barriers:

- Lack of awareness of these accommodations around belongings/pets
- Sharing a space with individuals one may not get along with or who uses substances
- Sharing washrooms
- Pets within the shelter
- Inability to bring to store belongings, or mobility challenges

Successes:

- More low-tech communication
- Opportunity for regular meals, socialization, rest and sleep
- Accommodating pets
- Support for individuals with disabilities to obtain and use their medical equipment
- Multilingual accommodation
- Ability to refer individuals to specialty services depending on their personal situation
- Ability to speak openly about, and use, substances



Suggested improvements from participants

1. Infrastructure

- Free, frequent shuttle options
- More resources for those homebound (repairs, A/C, heaters)
- Strive for consistency across different centres and spaces
- More resources and communication for site staff

2. Operational details

- Account for different needs –physical mobility, language, cultural
- Utilize places already familiar to potential users, with tailored activities
- More analogue (low-tech) communication (p2p, sandwich boards)
- More access to seating and activities, (clean) washrooms
- Night-time services

3. Concerns and perceptions



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- More resources (homebound heaters)
- Strive for consistency across different locations and spaces
- More resources for communication and staff

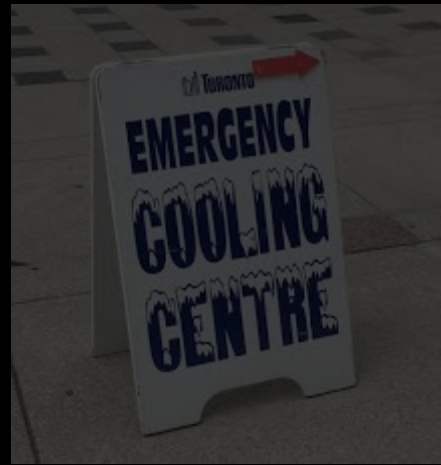
2. Operational details

Other Considerations:

- Reallocating resources so people can be cool where they live (e.g., utilizing common rooms in buildings as cooling rooms)
- Advancing tenant protections in meaningful ways

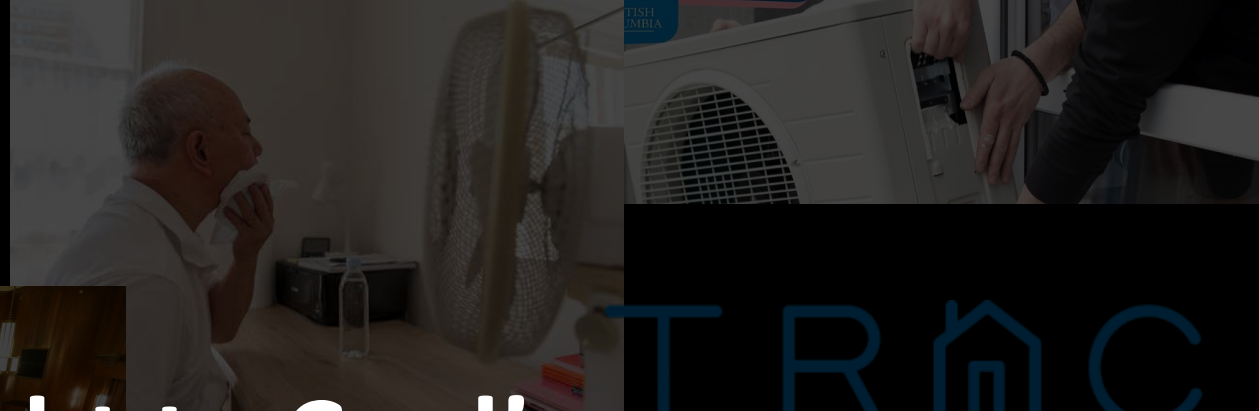
- activities, (clean) washrooms
- Night-time services

3. Concerns and perceptions



Free air
conditioners to
help vulnerable
people stay
cool

TISH
JIMBIA



TRAC
TENANT RESOURCE & ADVISORY CENTRE

Part II. 'Right to Cool'



What Is 'Right to Cool'?



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Update on Extreme Heat and Maximum Indoor Temperature Standard for Multi-unit Residential Buildings

Extreme heat events and overheating in the home – what is a safe indoor temperature limit

B.C. to require all new homes have a temperature-controlled room

ANDREA WOO >
INCLUDES CORRECTION
VANCOUVER
PUBLISHED AUGUST 17, 2023



Renter-focused

Cool It Now: Renters Deserve a Right to Cooling

Laws requiring building owners and landlords to provide for, or at the very least allow, air conditioning in residential rental units can protect vulnerable communities from extreme temperatures.

FEBRUARY 16, 2023

Hamilton

Hamilton bylaw could be 1st in Canada requiring landlords to provide air conditioning, lawyer says

Council will likely vote on bylaw next year to set a maximum heat standard for indoor spaces



Samantha Beattie · CBC News · Posted: May 15, 2023 3:14 PM CDT | Last Updated: May 15, 2023

Toward a Renter's Right to Heat-Safe Housing

Everyone deserves to stay safe and cool during extreme heat waves.

June 9, 2022



But it's not so simple...

Why air conditioners can be a problematic solution to extreme heat

Passive cooling, greenery, behaviour changes are more sustainable, researchers say



Emily Chung · CBC News · Posted: Jul 24, 2023 3:00 AM CDT | Last Updated: July 24, 2023

Vancouver's move to mandate mechanical air cooling in all new multifamily homes is misguided

DR. MICHAEL BRAUER, DR. CHRISTOPHER CARLSTEN, DR. MELISSA MCHALE, DR. LORIEN NESBITT AND DR. ADAM RYSANEK

CONTRIBUTED TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

PUBLISHED JULY 27, 2022

TENANT RIGHTS & EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

AN ANALYSIS OF INDOOR TEMPERATURE REQUIREMENTS IN US AND CANADIAN LANDLORD-TENANT LAW

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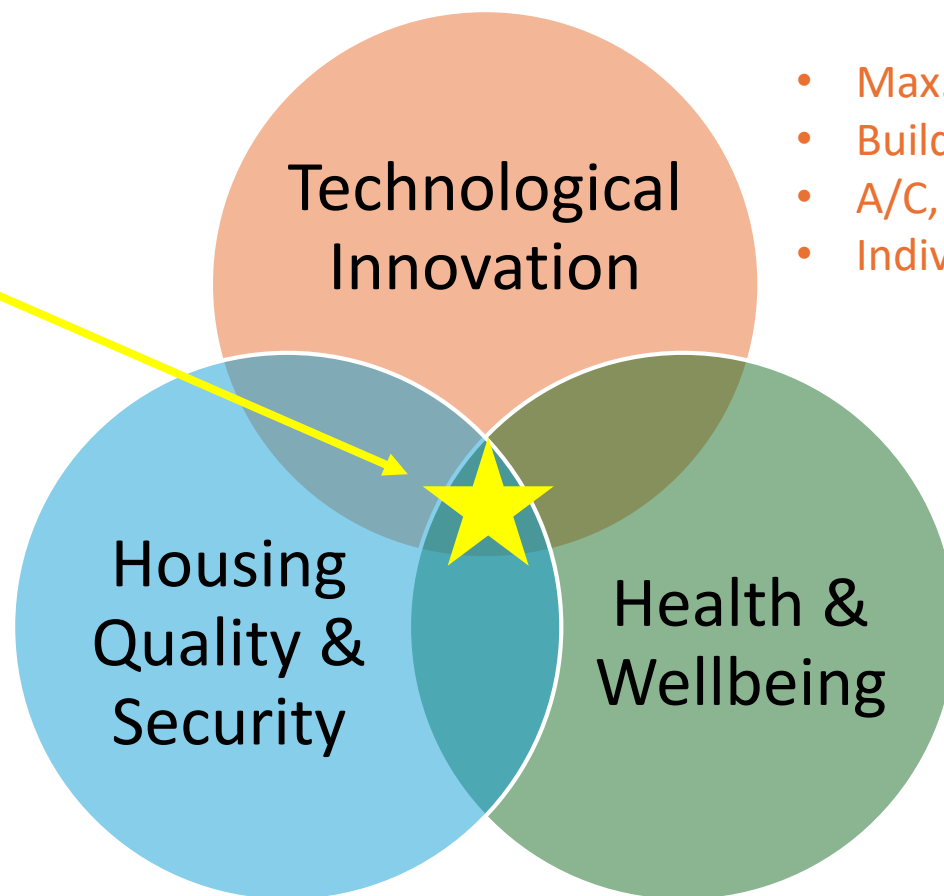


Different assumptions and approaches lead to different solutions

Broadly speaking, different approaches to 'Right to Cool' can be organized into:

'Right to Cool'!

- Guarantee of functional cooling that tenants can control without risk of displacement or rent hikes



- Max. indoor temp.
- Building engineering
- A/C, heatpumps
- Individual behaviour-oriented

- Public health policy
- Public infrastructure
- Urban planning
- Cooling centres, cool kits
- Individual behaviour-oriented
- Wellness checks
- Social connection

Mapping the landscape: Opportunities, Approaches and Perspectives

What we don't want:

Mere tinkering with the status quo so that *fewer* people die, but the fundamental inequities and challenges persist (e.g., housing precarity, inequitable access to resources, health as an individual success/fail endeavour rather than a communal pursuit)

Instead...

How can a Right to Cool help us advance more justice and healthier, more equitable communities?

How might a right to cool advance all three areas:

- Housing quality and security
 - Health and well-being
 - Technological innovation