

High Ground 2025 Impact Report

Our annual civic governance forum continues to inspire, inform, and connect progressive electeds (mayors, councillors, regional directors, and school trustees) from B.C. and across Canada around inspiring policies and practices, informed research, and transformative actions.

Better known as "High Ground," the theme of this year's event was "Tipping Points: Navigating Turbulent Times," exploring the question of whether things are really falling apart or if it just feels that way.

The 2025 forum took place from 1:00 PM on Friday, March 7 to 5:00 PM on Saturday, March 8 in Vancouver, BC.

Attendees:

This year, we had more than 115 attendees from communities across the province and beyond, including from:

- 23 Communities across British Columbia: Burnaby, Courtenay, Cumberland, Duncan, Kimberley, Langley, Maple Ridge, Mission, Nelson, New Westminster, North Vancouver, Penticton, Port Moody, Powell River, Saanich, Salt Spring Island, Squamish, Sunshine Coast, Town of Gibsons, Vancouver, Victoria, Village of Tahsis, West Vancouver.
- 5 Indigenous Communities: Tsleil-Waututh, Gitksan, Mohawk, Ojibwe, and Métis Nations.

Our thanks to students from UBC and SFU for help preparing this report and our student cohort sponsor, the Federation Of Post-Secondary Educators of BC.



Friday, March 7, 2025

Pre-Conference Workshop

9:00am -
12:00pm

At the Breaking Point: Mental Health Policy and Political Leadership in a Shifting Civic Landscape

In partnership with CMHA BC

1:00pm -
1:30pm

Opening and Territorial Welcome

1:30pm -
2:30pm

Fireside Chat with Minister Brittney Anderson and MLA George Anderson

2:30pm -
3:00pm

Break

3:00pm -
4:30pm

Skills Building Workshops (Group A)

From Eco-Anxiety to Action: How Local Leaders Can Implement Meaningful Climate Solutions

Leveraging Municipal-Community Partnerships to Respond to the Toxic Drug Crisis

4:30pm -
5:00pm

Recharge Break

5:00pm -
6:30pm

Networking Session

6:30pm -
8:30pm

Buffet Dinner and Evening Program

Keynote: Climate Change and Health: Unlocking Policy Change with Dr. Melissa Lem, CAPE BC

Saturday, March 8, 2025

8:00am - 9:00am	Breakfast and Introductory Remarks		
9:00am - 10:30am	Skills Building Workshops (Group B)		
	Coalition Building in the Energy Transition Era	Being an Active Bystander: What to Do and When to Do It	From Campaigns to Governance: Connecting with Communities Through Smart Communication
10:30am - 11:00am	Break		
11:00am - 12:30pm	Skills Building Workshops (Group C)		
	Cyber Hostility and Political Figures: A Crisis in Mental Health and Equity	Housing as a Human Right	Power Tools for Change Makers
12:30pm - 2:00pm	Buffet Lunch and Lunch Programming <i>Women and Gender Minorities in Leadership</i> <i>UBC Student Presentations</i>		
2:00pm - 3:15pm	World Cafe		
3:15pm - 3:30pm	Break		
3:30pm - 4:30pm	Closing Plenary: Political Polarization, Division and the Rise of Conspiracy in B.C.		
4:30pm - 5:00pm	Closing Remarks		

Friday, March 7, 2025

Pre-Conference Workshop - At the Breaking Point: Mental Health Policy and Political Leadership in a Shifting Civic Landscape (In partnership with CMHA BC)



Jonny Morris
CEO, CMHA BC



Kim Mackenzie
Director of Policy,
CMHA BC



Sarah Potts
Provincial Manager of
Crisis Care Reform,
CMHA BC

This interactive session combined policy analysis with personal development, offering progressive municipal leaders practical insights for both governance and self-care in an increasingly complex civic landscape.

Further Resources:

- **Health Justice** - Health Justice is a non-profit, charitable organization that uses research, education, and advocacy to transform the systems that shape mental health and substance use treatment in BC.
- **CRCL** - CRCL is a mobile, community-led crisis response team that provides support to people 13 years and older who are experiencing a mental health crisis. CRCL (pronounced circle) stands for Crisis Response, Community-Led, previously known as Peer Assisted Care Teams (PACT).
- **People Working Well** - People Working Well is a free resource provided by CMHA, BC proudly supported by the Province of British Columbia. We're here to support your journey towards building a healthier workplace.
- **Help Starts Here** - Help Starts Here is a collection of over 2,600 service listings publicly-funded or not-for-profit mental health and substance use supports and many articles featuring easy to understand language and curated information about commonly searched topics

Opening Remarks with Hermender Singh Kailley, BC Federation of Labour and Guy George, Tsleil-Waututh Nation



Opening Plenary: Fireside Chat with Minister Brittny Anderson and MLA George Anderson



Brittny Anderson
Minister of State for Local
Governments and Rural
Communities



George Anderson
Parliamentary Secretary
for Transit



Jonthan Fowlie (Moderator)
Chief Member Impact and
Experience
Officer, Vancity

“
*[local governments
are the] strongest
partners in
everything we
deliver”*
”

Workshop (Group A) - From Eco-Anxiety to Action: How Local Leaders Can Implement Meaningful Climate Solutions



Abbey Piazza
Senior Organizer, Youth
Climate Corps



Ian Picketts
Manager of Climate
and Sustainability, District of
Squamish

Local electeds face unique challenges as they balance the immense responsibility of addressing climate change with the need to maintain their own personal well-being. This workshop was designed to help local leaders recognize and tend to their own eco-anxiety, while scaling up climate action in their communities.

Workshop (Group A) - Leveraging Community-Municipal Partnerships to Respond to the Toxic Drug Crisis



Amanda Erickson
Consultant and Community
Action Team Coordinator,
Nelson, Castlegar, and
Grand Forks,
ANKORS



Cindy Lise
Regional Facilitator,
Our Cowichan Communities
Health Network



Daniel Synder
Chair and Project Coordinator,
Langley Overdose
Community Action Team

“
*The public health
emergency has
been raging for nine
years - that's not an
emergency, that's
the status quo.*
”



Leslie Payne
Councillor, City of Nelson



Michelle Staples,
Mayor, City of Duncan

This workshop focused on the role of Community Action Teams (CATs), intersectoral coalitions mandated to develop and implement tailored, action-focused strategies to address the toxic drug crisis. These teams bring together diverse stakeholders, including grassroots community organizations, local municipalities, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and social services, to create comprehensive and localized solutions to the crisis.

Further Resources:

- [Beyond the Stigma of Substance Use](#) - Youtube Series
- [Getting to Tomorrow: A Canadian Drug Policy Report](#) - Canadian Drug Policy Coalition
- [Statistical Reports on Deaths in British Columbia](#) - B.C. Coroners Service

Keynote - Climate Change and Health: Unlocking Policy Change with Dr. Melissa Lem, President, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), B.C.



“
Children who have more nature experiences are more likely to become adult environmentalists - and adults who are more connected to nature are more likely to protect it
”

Further Resources:

- [CAPE B.C.](#)
- [Park Prescriptions](#) - CAPE B.C.
- [LNG and Healthcare](#) - a CAPE B.C. website describing the health and healthcare system impacts of the fracking/LNG/natural gas industry
- [Heat Cook Breathe](#) - a CAPE B.C. website describing the health impacts of gas heating and cooking
- [The Health Costs of Climate](#) - Canadian Climate Institute
- [Communicating on Climate Change and Health: Toolkit for health professionals](#) - World Health Organization (WHO)

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Workshop (Group B) - Coalition Building in the Energy Transition Era



Andrew Williamson
Project Manager, ZEIC



Janet Andrews
Secretary-Treasurer
NWDLC

This workshop offered insights into effective coalition-building strategies, emphasizing cross-sector collaboration, shared vision development and long-term impact.

Drawing on ZEIC's Sustainable Workforce Coalition and other examples from across North America, local leaders learnt practical tools to identify key objectives, align diverse stakeholders, navigate challenges and sustain momentum to foster collective action to help achieve shared goals.



Jessica McIlroy
Councillor,
City of North Vancouver



Rita Steele
Founder, BIPOC
Sustainability Council

“

The power of the coalition is that everybody has a role, even if they don't agree with each other on most things

”

Workshop (Group B) - Being an Active Bystander: What to do and when to do it



Trudi Goels
Co-Founder,
Feminist Campaign School



Mary Trentadue
Organizational Facilitator
Feminist Campaign School

How do you become an active bystander? In this workshop, participants gained valuable bystander intervention skills, learning to recognize harm in workplaces or communities and respond effectively in the moment and beyond. This workshop is a call to action for building safer, more supportive spaces for leadership and collaboration.



Nadine Nakagawa
Councillor
City of New Westminster

“

If you hold the most power in the room, it is your responsibility to use the power to intervene

”

Workshop (Group B) - From Campaigns to Governance: Connecting with Communities through Smart Communication



Roberto Wohlgemuth
Founder & CEO
Rubikon Intel

Effective leadership doesn't stop after the election. To govern successfully, leaders must consistently engage constituents, communicate achievements, and amplify their impact amidst the constant noise of modern media. This workshop equipped mayors, councillors, and campaign teams with precision communication strategies that are equally powerful during campaigns and in day-to-day governance.

Workshop (Group C) - Cyber Hostility and Political Figures: A Crisis in Mental Health and Equity



Ankita Goyal
Research & Communications
Coordinator,
Centre for Civic Governance



Tariq Tyab
Co-Founder,
Foundation for a Path
Forward

How can governance evolve to meet the demands of equity? This workshop brings together insights from the INSPIRE project (Inclusive Networking and Support for Public Officials in Rural Environments), a collaborative initiative between CCG and the Foundation for a Path Forward, funded by the Law Foundation of BC.

Further Resources:

- [The INSPIRE Project](#) - a collaboration between CCG and the Foundation for a Path Forward.

Workshop (Group C) - Housing as a Human Right



Amy Lubik
Councillor, City of
Port Moody



Bailey Waukey
Senior Policy Analyst
Aboriginal Housing Management
Association

During this panel session, speakers considered housing as a human right within international and federal law, with an emphasis on reconciliation and UNDRIP in housing. They showcased promising practices of how municipalities and community partners are actioning housing as a human right in Canada and BC while also discussing the implication of housing on never-ceded lands.

“

A roof is not enough, there are many other social factors to be addressed

”



Rowan Burdge
Provincial Director,
B.C. Poverty Reduction
Coalition



Veronique Sioufi
Racial Equity Researcher &
Policy Analyst,
B.C. Society for Policy Solutions

Further Resources:

- [The TRC Calls to Action in B.C. Municipalities](#) - Women Transforming Cities
- [Understanding and Implementing UNDRIP: a guide for municipalities](#) - Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- [How Municipalities Can Support](#) - Aboriginal Housing Management Association
- [Housing as a Human Right](#) - B.C. Poverty Reduction Coalition

Workshop (Group C) - Power Tools for Change Makers



Andrea Reimer
Founder, Principal &
Chief Strategist
Tawâw Strategies

How many times have you seen great ideas take much longer to come to fruition than they needed to, or even fail all together, because people or politics got in the way? It doesn't have to be that way!

Power literacy is a skill like any other that can be learned and the practice of navigating power perfected. This workshop gave participants a common language for power and the building blocks for a greater understanding of their own power, as well as the tools to connect their power to their work as a change maker.

Closing Plenary - Political Polarization, Division, and the Rise of Conspiracy in B.C.



Erin Blondeau
Communications Director
Climate Emergency Unit



Evan Balgord
Executive Director
Canadian Anti-Hate
Network

Intense polarization has infiltrated politics across the world, and BC is not immune. This plenary explored how the rise of hate and conspiracy theories has exasperated this division, and what local electeds can do to counter it in their governance, communities, and public engagement.

“
We need to take back the word woke - every person in this room is awake to the needs of their community
”



Kay Kearley
Research & Training
Coordinator,
B.C. Flying Squad
Against Transphobia



Susan Kim (Moderator)
Councillor,
City of Victoria

“
People have a huge affinity for conspiracy - they are turning those conspiracy groups into voting blocks.
”

Further Resources:

- [Canadian Anti-Hate Network](#)
- [B.C. Flying Squad](#)
- [Climate Emergency Unit](#)
- [Revolve Cowichan](#)

Testimonials

"[High Ground] was a great conference. So reaffirming of how powerful simple true approaches to our work are. [It] helps us all keep the faith."

"[High Ground] was in every respect an event that's very much needed, especially as we are in 2nd half of the term, redesigning what may be the next call. The special speakers gathered and the attendees provides a gathering that ensured we are not alone in this journey."

"As a progressive minority in my community, the pressure to represent so many marginalized voices can feel intense. I look forward to High Ground each year as a place where I can connect with values-aligned peers, a place where I can put those pressures aside and feel grounded in myself again. I leave feeling refreshed and ready to re-open my to-do list!"

"Have always found HG valuable because it it includes the impact of meta trends on local government."

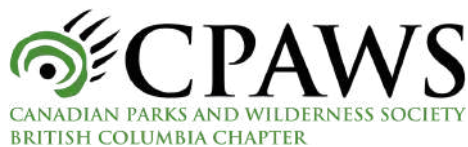
"I enjoyed networking with other progressives and meeting people from around the province."



Thank you to our 9 forum sponsors...




...and our 3 tabling sponsors





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The Centre for Civic Governance is located on the unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəy^{əm} (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.