



IPAC | **AMIC**
Indigenous Physicians
Association of Canada | Association de médecins
indigènes du Canada

IPAC Member Survey

CEPA & Bill S-5

Introduction

In June of 2023, Bill S-5, the Strengthening Environmental Protection for a Healthier Canada Act, received final approval by the Senate. Bill S-5 is federal legislation that amends the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). With this Bill, the Government of Canada is delivering on its commitment to strengthen CEPA and recognize, for the first time in federal law, that every individual in Canada has a right to a healthy environment.

CEPA requires that the Government of Canada shall, within two years of Bill S-5 receiving Royal Assent, develop an implementation framework for the right to a healthy environment. This framework will set out how the right to a healthy environment will be considered when administering the act.





Introduction

In developing the implementation framework, the Government is seeking input from interested Canadians, including Indigenous partners. The Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada surveyed its members to explore their perspectives on Bill S-5 and discuss how current environmental changes have impacted themselves and their communities.

Responses were collected and analyzed using the online survey tool SurveyMonkey. Thematic analysis was used to group respondents' answers based on common patterns, recurring motifs, and underlying themes, providing a structured framework for discussing the various perspectives identified within the dataset.



Introduction

The most endorsed themes from the analysis are discussed in the report below. The report is divided into five sections, each examining a different aspect of respondents' answers. The sections are as follows:

1. Data Collection and Respondent Demographics
2. Background knowledge of CEPA and Bill S-5
3. Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts
4. Discussions of Implementation Framework for Bill S-5
5. Discussion of Government Reporting for the Implementation Framework

Data Collection and Respondent Demographics



A total of 71 IPAC members responded to the survey, with a completion rate of 51%. The survey was comprised of a mix of open-ended and 5-point Likert scale questions.

The survey included questions specific to the respondent's community. Respondents were asked to specify what community they were considering when answering these questions, and whether they were currently residing in that community. Most respondents were referencing either a community in which they currently resided (44%) or the community in which they were raised but do not currently live (46%). 10% of respondents referred to communities where they had familial ties but did not personally reside.

Data Collection and Respondent Demographics



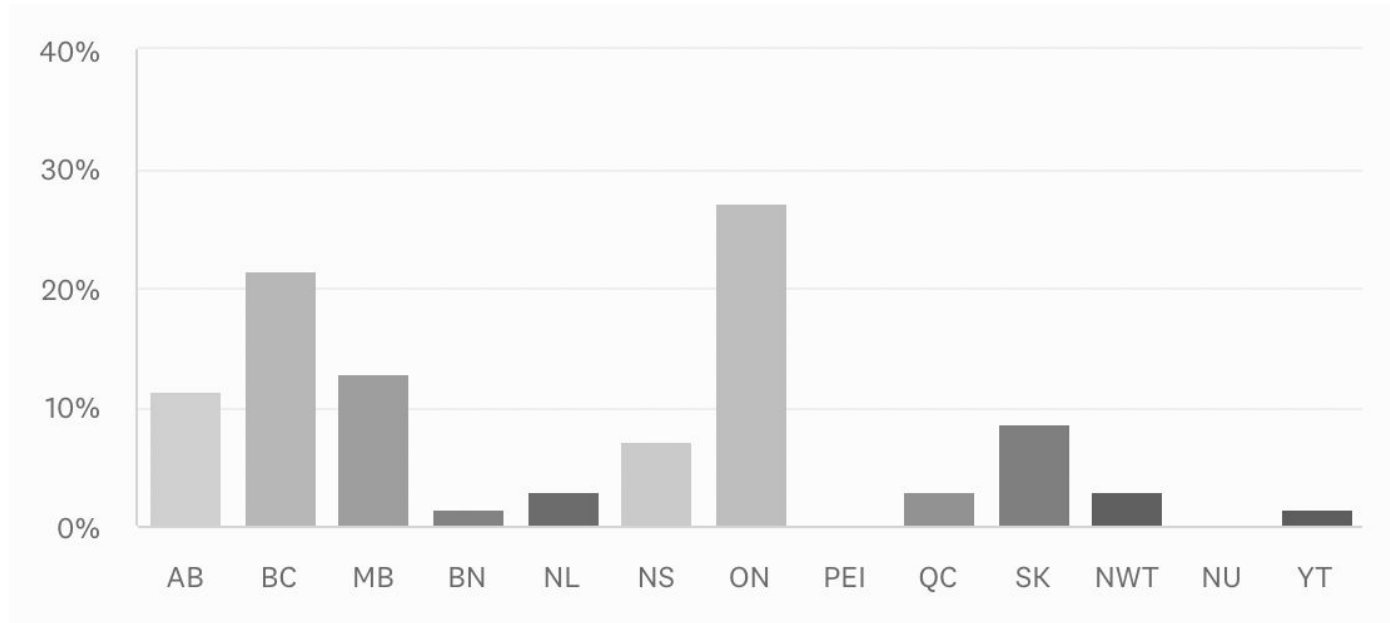
The size of the communities that respondents were referencing in their answers were varied:

- 56% of respondents referenced communities with a population of less than 10,000.
- 17% of respondents referenced communities with a population between 10,000-100,000.
- 27% of respondents referenced communities 100,000 or more in population size.

Data Collection and Respondent Demographics



The location of the communities' respondents we're referencing are as follows:





Background knowledge of CEPA and Bill S-5

Respondents were asked to rate their familiarity with the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA) and Bill S-5.

When asked about their familiarity with the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, the majority of respondents described themselves as not at all familiar (**28%**) or not very familiar (**49%**) with the Act.

19% of respondents described themselves as somewhat familiar with the act, and **4%** described themselves as very familiar with the act.



Background knowledge of CEPA and Bill S-5

Similarly, when asked about their familiarity with Bill S-5, the *Strengthening Environmental Protection for a Healthier Canada Act*, the majority of respondents described themselves as not at all familiar (**34%**) or not very familiar (**49%**) with the Act.

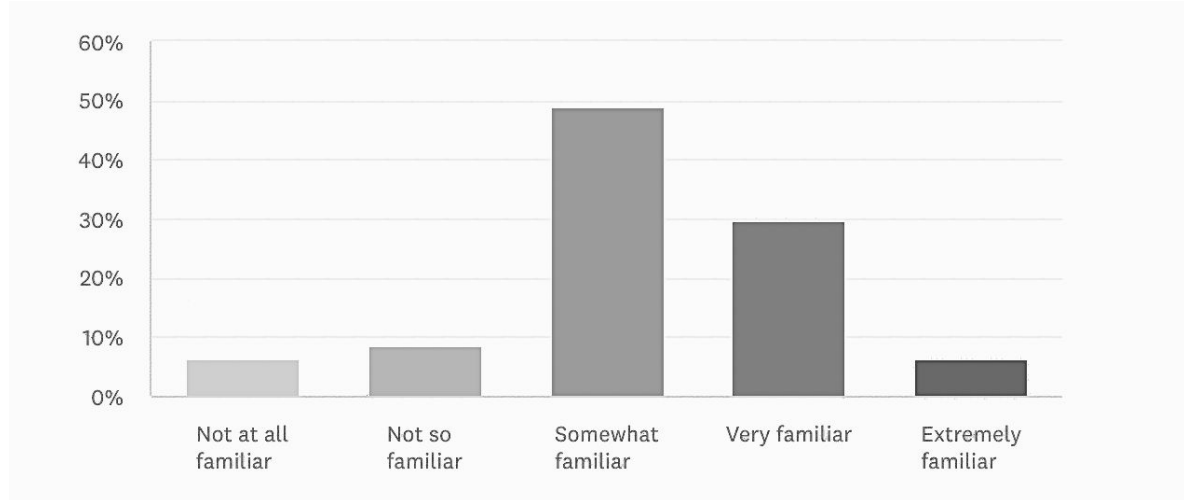
16% of respondents described themselves as being somewhat familiar with the Act, and only **1%** of respondents described themselves as being very familiar with the Act.

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



Understanding Indigenous communities' historical relationship with the environment is crucial in the context of environmental legislation affecting them. Respondents were asked to rate their familiarity with their communities' traditional relationship with the environment, as well as to describe the practices and values they were aware of.

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



When asked about their familiarity with their communities' historical environment practices, the majority of respondents (**49%**) described themselves as somewhat familiar with these topics, while a smaller number described themselves as very familiar (**30%**) or extremely familiar (**6%**).

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



Respondents were asked to describe their community's traditional practices and values related to the environment and sustainability. In analyzing their responses, two commonly endorsed themes emerged: limiting resource consumption to necessity and prioritizing sustainability in hunting, fishing, and harvesting practices. The notion of stewardship was particularly emphasized, with respondents highlighting the importance of ensuring environmental well-being for future generations as a core community value:

“[My community’s traditional values centred around] respect for the land, understanding the interconnectedness of all living things, and the principle of taking only what is needed. These practices and values foster a deep sense of stewardship for the environment, ensuring its well-being for future generations.”

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



When asked how the process of modernization impacted their communities' sustainability practices, participants emphasized two key losses: the loss of access to traditional lands and territories, and the resulting change in their communities' traditional relationship with the land. One participant described how their community's displacement from their traditional lands created a cultural disconnect with the environment and prevented community members from continuing the practices necessary for maintaining ecological balance and biodiversity.

“The impact has been profound, with a loss of language, removal from traditional hunting territory, harms done to family dynamics resulting in less teaching of the traditional sustainability practices.”

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts

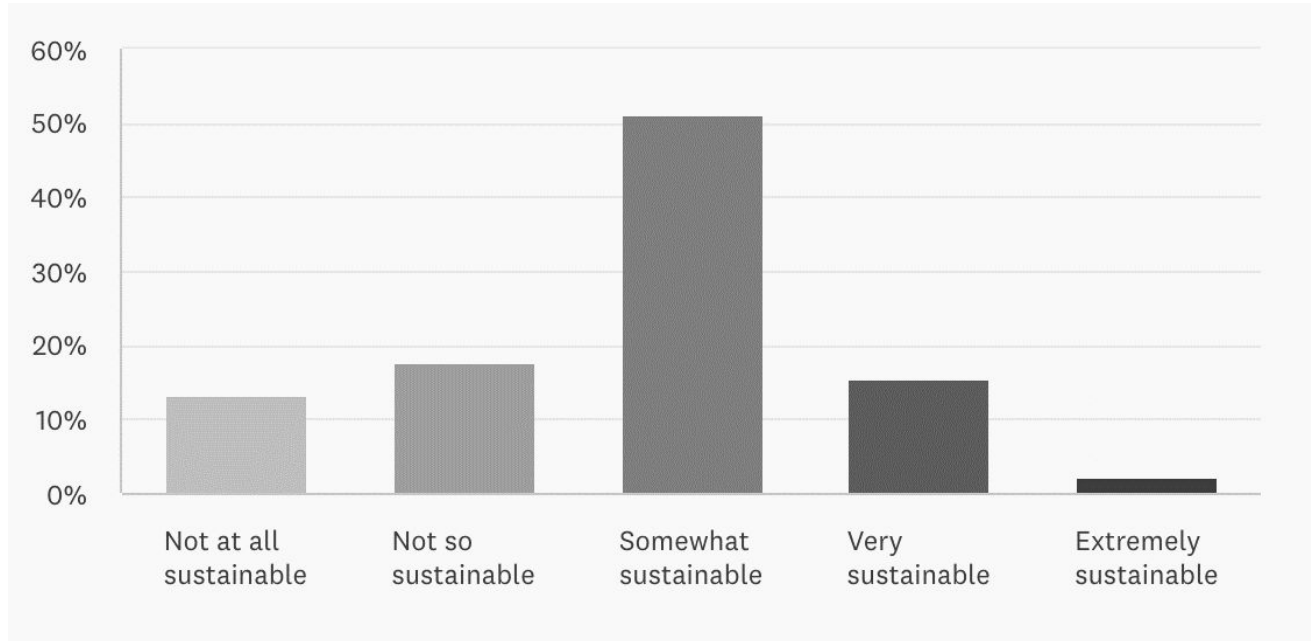


Another recurring theme described how modernization led to an increased cultural emphasis on consumerism, which has resulted in less sustainable practices and more waste in their communities. A participant explained how modernization “*has undoubtedly increased the amount of waste and emissions created by my community [...] folks are less connected to the land and nature than they were in the past.*”

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



Respondents were asked to assess their communities' current practices, in terms of environmental sustainability.



Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



Respondents were asked to provide examples of how current environmental issues have been impacting themselves and their communities. The impacts of pollution were highly endorsed – participants described how increased air and water pollution have directly impacted the health and well-being of individuals living in their communities. Respondents described increased rates of asthma, cancer, and mental health challenges as a result of environmental pollution and the changing environmental landscape.

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



“It permeates the entire community. We cannot safely eat from the water, drink the water, swim in the water, grow from our gardens, have cattle graze on our soils and grasses, or pick the medicines that we used to pick for health and illness. Our mother has become so sick that we cannot interact with her.”

When asked about what barriers or challenges their communities might face in maintaining or improving environmental sustainability, the majority of participants identified financial barriers, both individual and communal, as preventing them from adopting more sustainable practices.

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



As one participant explained, ***“We have been stewards of the land for so long, but capitalism has put any concerns for the environment on hold since our people also wish to earn a livelihood.”***

The conflict between needing to create financial stability and a desire to promote environmental sustainability was highly discussed. In discussing long-term environmental sustainability, one respondent asked a salient question: ***“How can you look to the future when you are only trying to get through the present?”*** Respondents explained how the pressing and immediate financial challenges their communities faced made it challenging to consider or adopt more sustainable practices.

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



Many respondents echoed this sentiment, describing how the introduction of coal mining or pipeline projects represented both a threat to the environment but also provided jobs and financial stability that their communities needed. As a result of these conflicts, these projects divided their community. The participant explained how many members felt that the economic benefits of mining operations could outweigh the environmental impacts. Another participant echoed this sentiment when discussing pipeline projects in their community, and how the financial instability of their people made them more willing to embrace the projects:

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



“The government puts profit/money over the environment and sustainability. They focus on short-term benefits [...] and they get our people with that concept, offering them money/jobs on these pipelines [...] using their current need of finances, to override their historical values & responsibilities.”

When respondents were asked what environmental challenges future generations would face, the most endorsed theme discussed the immediate and long-term impacts of environmental change in their community. These impacts include a lack of access to clean air and water leading to direct physiological impacts on their community, the rising temperature and increased incidence of forest fire, and the increasing loss of biodiversity and ecological stability on their land.

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



“[Challenges include] increased respiratory problems due to air pollution, reduced water quality affecting health and livelihoods, and extreme weather events leading to property damage and displacement. Environmental changes can also impact local ecosystems, leading to loss of biodiversity and affecting food sources and traditional practices in some communities.”

As seen in the above quote, of particular concern to respondents were the social impacts of these changes: respondents described how future generations would be unable to continue their traditional relationship with the land, and how this would lead to cultural erasure.

Historical Relationship with the Environment and Current Environmental Impacts



“The process of colonization and modernization often disrupted traditional environmental sustainability practices by imposing external land management systems, reducing access to traditional territories, and changing the relationship between communities and their natural surroundings. This could lead to a loss of indigenous knowledge and practices that were crucial for maintaining ecological balance and biodiversity.”

Implementation Framework



In discussing the implementation framework for Bill S-5, respondents were asked to elaborate on what they considered to be the key elements of a healthy environment. The most endorsed elements were access to clean water, unpolluted air, and stable ecosystems. One respondent's answer summarized these perspectives: ***“A healthy environment typically hinges on clean air and water, biodiversity, sustainable resource use, minimal pollution, and a stable climate.”***

While respondents' answers were primarily focused on the environment itself, several respondents also acknowledged that the well-being of the environment and the well-being of their communities were intricately related to one another.

Implementation Framework



“[...] the natural world is alive and our survival as humans is directly related to the health of the natural world; and a reciprocal co-existence with air, water, earth and animals.”

As a result of this close relationship, another key element of a healthy environment was the mental and spiritual well-being of the people living in it. Respondents described how their communities and the land on which they lived worked together and relied on one another for well-being, and that environmental well-being would manifest itself as well-being for themselves and their community:

Implementation Framework



“I would be thriving in my own being - healthy and without disease with intact family and community systems and the ability to nourish my body directly from the environment (food, water, clothes, housing) without risk of harm.”

When asked to share ideas about the principle of non-regression in the implementation of Bill S-5, the most endorsed theme related to monitoring and accountability. Participants emphasized the importance of transparency regarding the implementation and monitoring of the framework, as well as clear mechanisms for holding both industry and government accountable for upholding the right to a healthy environment.

Implementation Framework



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Implementation Framework



“[...] evidence of comprehensive environmental impact assessments, public participation in decision-making, adherence to strict environmental standards, ongoing monitoring, transparent reporting, and accountability measures would be crucial.”

A number of respondents also expressed concerns about the possibility that any standards or policies implemented toward environmental protection could be reversed or undercut by future governments. The participants believed that for the principle of non-regression to be effectively incorporated into the implementation framework, there must be mechanisms in place to safeguard environmental policies from being rolled back or diluted by subsequent administrations, ensuring continuity and long-term commitment to sustainability goals.

Implementation Framework



“Non-regression can be implemented by not allowing changes/backtracking on policies that have data showing they prevent environmental damage and/or promote sustainable living”

When asked how the implementation framework could incorporate Indigenous Knowledge systems, the vast majority of respondents endorsed the notions of meaningful consultation, but there was a diversity of opinions on how this consultation may occur. Several respondents called for the integration of Western systems with Indigenous perspectives and emphasized the value of the notion of ‘Two-eyed seeing’. The concept of two-eyed seeing refers to the ability to see the world through both Indigenous and Western perspectives, recognizing the strengths and contributions of each while also acknowledging their differences.

Implementation Framework



One respondent's answer was particularly effective in describing this concept:

“Integrating Indigenous knowledge with Western systems requires respect, collaboration, and open dialogue. Indigenous perspectives offer holistic, place-based insights, complementing Western analytical approaches. Effective integration involves co-development of research, policy, and programs, ensuring Indigenous voices guide and inform all stages. This approach enriches scientific understanding, policy relevance, and program effectiveness, fostering sustainable solutions that honour diverse ways of knowing.”

Implementation Framework



An important point from the above quote – and one endorsed by a number of other respondents – was the importance of recognizing place-based insights, and acknowledging the huge diversity of location, culture, and history amongst indigenous communities. Recognizing this diversity was described as an essential component to effectively incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the implementation framework. As one respondent put it: “*It has to be done community by community*” to accurately capture the specific perspectives and needs of each group.

Reporting



Respondents were asked about what aspects of environmental protection they would like to see in the government's yearly report. The most endorsed theme that emerged was outcome measurement – respondents wanted transparent reporting on the outcomes of any government intervention. Specific aspects included: the measurement of mercury and other heavy metal contaminants in the water sources of communities, the status of drinking water on Indigenous communities, and measures on the preservation of biodiversity within Indigenous territories.

Respondents wanted to ensure that these measures were taking into consideration the specific context of Indigenous communities, in terms of their connectedness with their land and subsequent vulnerability to environmental outcomes.

Reporting



Another related feature of the report described by respondents was a detailed exploration of how and when Indigenous elders and other community members were involved in the creation and implementation of environmental protection policies. One respondent described their frustration at the current status of how consultation is reported: *“All too often a report simply reads “we consulted with First Nations partners” without describing how that was done, or who it was done with.”*

Respondents also expressed that the reporting could be made more effective if it had Indigenous voices included in it. Examples of this inclusion discussed by respondents include the inclusion of Indigenous-led research into the yearly report and a specific section of the annual report being created by Indigenous people that focused on Indigenous-specific outcomes. Respondents suggested that the inclusion of these perspectives provided more confidence that the right to a healthy environment was being protected in a culturally relevant way.

Reporting



Respondents were asked to suggest measures for assessing and holding the government accountable for protecting the right to a healthy environment. Transparent and clear communication emerged as the most endorsed theme from this section, with respondents expressing the importance of transparency in reporting the implementation and efficacy of the protection policy.

Respondents also endorsed the idea of establishing clear standards and accountability measures for the government. Established standards were seen as essential for ensuring that environmental assessments are conducted, while accountability measures were viewed as necessary mechanisms to hold government agencies responsible for their decisions and actions in this domain.

Summary



The majority of respondents displayed low familiarity with both the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA)* and Bill S-5, with most indicating they were either not at all familiar or not very familiar. This lack of awareness raises concerns about public engagement and awareness regarding environmental legislation.

In discussing the traditional practices and values of their communities, respondents emphasized themes such as limiting resource consumption, prioritizing sustainability in hunting, fishing, and harvesting, and stewardship for future generations. They also reflected on how colonization/modernization has led to significant losses, including access to traditional lands and territories, a disconnect with the environment, increased consumerism, and a decrease in sustainable practices, resulting in environmental degradation and cultural harm.

Summary



When asked about the impact of environmental changes on their communities, respondents highlighted how pollution of their communities' air and water supply has led to increased health issues such as asthma, cancer, and mental health challenges. Financial barriers were identified as a major obstacle to implementing sustainable practices, with capitalism often prioritizing economic gain over environmental stewardship, creating tension between immediate financial needs and long-term sustainability goals.

Respondents also expressed concern about the environmental challenges future generations will face, emphasizing the immediate and long-term impacts of environmental change on their communities. These challenges include reduced access to clean air and water, increased incidence of forest fires, loss of biodiversity, and ecological instability. Of particular concern were the social impacts, such as the inability to maintain traditional relationships with the land, leading to cultural erasure due to disruptions caused by colonization and modernization.

Summary



In discussing the right to a healthy environment, respondents emphasized access to clean water, unpolluted air, and stable ecosystems as key elements. Many respondents recognized the interconnectedness between environmental well-being and community health, highlighting the importance of environmental connectedness to the mental and spiritual well-being of their communities.

In discussing the implementation framework for the right to a healthy environment, respondents stressed the need for monitoring, transparency, and accountability mechanisms to prevent policy rollbacks and ensure continuity in environmental protection efforts. They called for safeguards against future governments undercutting or reversing environmental policies, advocating for decision-making based on data and a commitment to sustainable living.

Summary



Responses regarding the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge systems into the implementation framework were varied, with a significant number of respondents supporting the inclusion of meaningful consultation into the framework, there were varied opinions on how this should be done. Many advocated for integrating Indigenous and Western systems, emphasizing the concept of 'Two-eyed seeing' to recognize and leverage the strengths of both perspectives. Another important element that emerged from these responses was the importance of respecting diversity among Indigenous communities and recognizing place-based insights. Respondents emphasized the need for tailored approaches on a community-by-community basis to address their specific perspectives and needs accurately.

Summary



When asked what they would like to see in the government's yearly environmental report, respondents emphasized the desire to see the outcomes of the interventions reported in a clear and understandable format. Suggestions on the topics covered in this report included: mercury and heavy metal contamination in water sources surrounding Indigenous communities, the status of drinking water, and measures for biodiversity preservation.

Respondents also called for yearly reports to consider the specific context of Indigenous communities and involve Indigenous elders, community members and stakeholders in policy creation and implementation, with transparent communication, clear standards, and accountability measures to hold the government responsible for protecting the right to a healthy environment.