

# PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES 2021

# Emergency Management and Disaster Mitigation

## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

### Planning

CPWA recognizes that the federal government is dedicated to working collaboratively with provinces and territories to support communities when disasters strike and that Public Safety Canada provides oversight and guidance in the setting of exercise priorities and co-sponsors key activities with lead departments through the [Emergency Management National Exercise Program](#). It is also important to consider the role of local governments.

Public works agencies operate and maintain critical infrastructure services that are vital to communities, such as transportation networks, energy and water supplies, sewage and refuse disposal systems, and public facilities. Public works agencies are also responsible for many aspects of emergency planning and disaster response, including assessing damage to buildings and infrastructure; clearing and disposing of debris; removing snow in blizzard conditions ahead of police and fire services; securing critical facilities and restoring lifeline services; managing traffic and coordinating municipal vehicles, equipment and manpower; and ensuring a safe public water supply. In 2017, the American Public Works Association (APWA) announced the creation of a "Public Works First Responder" symbol for use throughout North America to identify public works personnel and acknowledge their role as first responders.

Budget 2019 proposed to provide \$5.0 million over five years, starting in 2019–20, to Public Safety Canada to develop all-hazard awareness-raising activities that are targeted to specific, at-risk audiences such as low-income Canadians, seniors, people with disabilities, recent immigrants, and Indigenous Peoples. **There is also a need for funding and best-practice guidance that supports public works agencies in effectively responding to disasters by enabling training, mapping, assessments of technical capability, and implementation of response and recovery plans.** Many

public agencies, particularly in small and rural communities, need assistance developing and implementing all-hazard emergency preparedness plans, pre-disaster mitigation plans and long-term hazard mitigation measures. **Public works agencies, as well as First Nations, Inuit and Métis, must be included in education and training efforts; have access to tools and resources, such as climate and weather forecasts, rainfall data and risk models; and have access to new technologies that can assist in emergency response activities.** For instance, public works agencies utilize drones for inspecting infrastructure, aerial surveys, and traffic monitoring. **While air safety and privacy are critically important, it is also important that this is balanced with the need for public works agencies to use drones as a cost-effective tool for data gathering.**

- **Ensure that public works agencies have access to dependable, predictable funding for the development and implementation of comprehensive, all-hazard emergency preparedness plans, pre-disaster mitigation plans and long-term hazard mitigation measures.**
- **Encourage a collective approach to emergency management by including public works agencies, as well as First Nations, Inuit and Métis, in cross-sector task forces and study groups responsible for all-hazards education, training exercises and development of best practices.**
- **Encourage the development and coordination of timely information and tools to enhance and support the emergency management capabilities of public works agencies, as well as First Nations, Inuit and Métis, including coordination of Incident Management Teams.**
- **Allow for flexibility in the municipal use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS)/drones, which public works agencies use for emergency management activities.**

### Funding

Budget 2017 earmarked \$2 billion over 10 years to establish the [Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund \(DMAF\)](#), supporting large-scale infrastructure projects to help communities better manage the risks of disasters triggered by natural hazards. **But the minimum of \$20 million in eligible expenditures makes it difficult for small communities to apply.**

According to Public Safety Canada, floods are the costliest natural disasters in Canada in terms of property damage. To restrict development in areas of high flood risk, federal, provincial and territorial governments have designated a number of flood prone areas in Canada. But according to a 2019 Insurance Board of Canada report, [A Primer on Severe Weather and Overland Flood Insurance in Canada](#), flood hazard maps are either unavailable or outdated in many areas of Canada. Budget 2019 proposed \$151.23 million over five years, starting in 2019–20, and \$9.28 million per year ongoing, to improve emergency management in Canada, including enhancing our understanding of the risks posed by floods, wildfires, and earthquakes. **Given that public works agencies rely on flood hazard maps to plan and manage their infrastructure investments, it is critical that these resources effectively communicate all current flood hazards.**

- **Expand the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF) to support communities of all sizes by eliminating the \$20 million minimum project eligibility threshold.**
- **Dedicate federal funding and accelerate the timeline for updating Canada's flood hazard maps to show all potential sources of overland flood (fluvial, pluvial, and coastal).**

### Communications

Communication is increasingly recognized as a critical component of operating public infrastructure and public works agencies must

be able to depend on reliable interoperable emergency communications systems that connect them during preparedness, response and recovery operations to other first responders, including law enforcement, fire, emergency medical professionals, and other public works agencies. Communications interoperability is particularly critical when emergency responders provide mutual aid to other communities.

Efforts to establish a public safety broadband network (PSBN) in Canada are underway and it is important that public works be part of this effort. A [Temporary National Coordination Office \(TNCO\)](#) was established in 2018 with the support of Federal, Provincial and Territorial (FPT) Ministers responsible for emergency management to develop recommendations for the potential development of a PSBN across the country. The TNCO published a [Progress Report on a National Public Safety Broadband Network](#) in 2019 and a policy paper to FPT ministers responsible for emergency management is forthcoming.

In the United States, nationwide wireless broadband network [FirstNet](#) was launched in 2018 through a public-private partnership between the U.S. federal government and AT&T. APWA is a member of [FirstNet's Public Safety Advisory Committee \(PSAC\)](#), whose mission is to assist FirstNet in carrying out its duties and responsibilities and consists of members representing all disciplines of public safety.

- **Establish and support a dedicated Canadian Public Safety Broadband Network (PSBN) to provide communications interoperability to first responders and public safety personnel and ensure that public works agencies have access.**

#### **Cyber Threats and Telecommunications**

Public works agencies are responsible for many of the cyber systems that control traffic management, water and sewage treatment facilities, emergency services/communications, and other vital operations and services. It is important that these cyber

systems are hardened and resilient to the increasing threat of malicious acts, as well as to damage and disruption from natural or technological disasters. It is essential that the federal government develop national cybersecurity guidelines/best practices and to work with provincial, territorial and local governments to share threat information and provide technical support to protect computer networks and other related critical infrastructure.

- **Work with provincial, territorial and local governments to develop comprehensive cybersecurity guidelines/best practices and training programs to support public works agencies that deliver services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.**
- **Work with provincial, territorial and local governments to share threat information and provide technical support to protect computer networks and other related critical infrastructure.**