

# Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians

A collection of texts in response to  
*Acting on Climate Change:  
Solutions from Canadian Scholars*,  
a consensus document released in March 2015



# GENERATION|squeeze

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

## GENERATION SQUEEZE

PAUL KERSHAW

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Generation Squeeze is a uniquely positioned, national, non-partisan organization that speaks up for Canadians in their 20s, 30s, 40s and younger who are squeezed by lower incomes, higher costs, less time, and a deteriorating environment. Because governments are less willing to adapt for younger Canadians than others, we're squeezing back so Canada works for all generations.

A CARP for Younger Canada: our enterprise takes inspiration from the model of generational organizing implemented by the Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP), which lobbies on behalf of Canadians age 50+.

Our theory of change is simple: if younger Canadians had an organization with political and market clout that matched that of CARP, governments would be more likely to adapt policies to address the squeeze on their generation with the same conviction they do for the aging population. Presently, Canadian governments combine to spend \$33 000 to \$40 000 annually per person age 65 and older, compared to less than \$12 000 per person under age 45; and governments leave younger generations larger fiscal and environmental debts than were inherited by today's aging population when they were young adults.

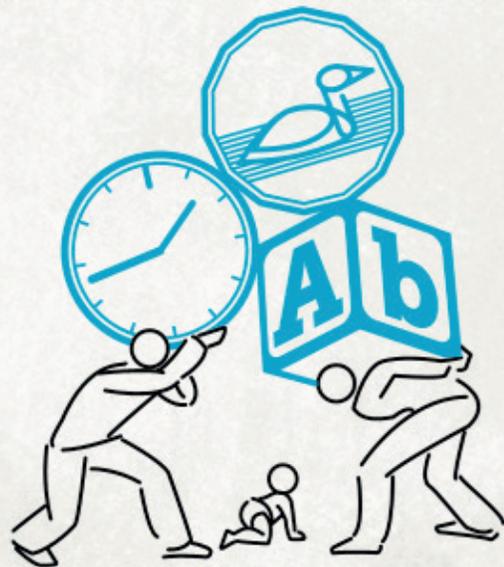
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OFFICIAL WEBSITE

[gensqueeze.ca](http://gensqueeze.ca)

GENERATIONS IN THEIR 20S, 30S, 40S & THEIR CHILDREN  
ARE SQUEEZED FOR...



**TIME**

AT HOME WITH CHILDREN

**SERVICES**

AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

**MONEY**

HIGHER STUDENT DEBTS,  
HIGHER HOUSING COSTS,  
& STAGNANT INCOMES

WHILE LEFT WITH LARGER

**GOVERNMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEBTS**

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT CANADIANS IN THEIR 20S, 30S, 40S AND THE CHILDREN THEY RAISE ARE SQUEEZED BY LOWER INCOMES, HIGHER COSTS, LESS TIME AND A DETERIORATING ENVIRONMENT COMPARED TO A GENERATION AGO.

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**GENERATION  
SQUEEZE**

# Building Political Will

## for a Low-carbon, High Prosperity Canada

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### Endorsing the Report. Adopting its Recommendations.

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Generation Squeeze<sup>1</sup> applauds the time, expertise and process used to produce the Sustainable Canada Dialogues 2015 report *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*. We are inspired by the vision for Canada presented in the report, and enthusiastically embrace its recommendations to move toward a sustainable, low-carbon, high prosperity Canada that works for all generations. The recommendations are powerful in part because they reflect a consensus among more than 60 scholars representing every region in the country, and also because they articulate science-based, viable solutions for greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions that will ensure Canadians successfully meet our international obligations, along with our domestic commitments to intergenerational fairness.

Generation Squeeze has integrated the *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* recommendations to inform our vision for a *Better Generational*

*Deal*<sup>2</sup>: one that gives all Canadians a chance to live up to our potential, enough time and money to enjoy life, and the opportunity to work together to leave our country and planet better off than we found them. To this end, we pursue policy adaptations that enhance the ability of younger Canadians to:

- Pay off student debt
- Find a good job
- Reduce the time it takes to save and pay for a home
- Afford a family
- Save for retirement
- **All while leaving at least as much as we inherited**
- **Using and collecting tax dollars better**

In pursuit of the final two components of a Better Generational Deal, we formally endorse recommendations from *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*.

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1 <http://www.gensqueeze.ca>

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2 <http://www.gensqueeze.ca/policies>

Specifically, in order to leave at least as much as we inherit, Generation Squeeze endorses the recommendations to:

- Build East-West intelligent grid connections that allow provinces producing hydroelectricity to sell electricity to their neighbours while taking full advantage of Canada's low-carbon energy potential. Hydroelectricity could then be combined with intermittent renewables such as wind and solar energy across the country so Canada relies 100% on low-carbon electricity production by 2035.
- Well-managed energy efficiency programs that produce significant positive economic returns across the board, through cost savings as well as job creation. Energy efficiency programs could target the building sector, businesses and industries, and especially transportation.
- Support evolution of the building sector toward a carbon neutral or carbon-positive sector, including investment in renewable and ambient energy for new and existing buildings. Integrate sustainability and climate change into landscape planning at the regional and city levels to ensure that, amongst other goals, new and maintenance infrastructure investments are consistent with the long-term goal of decarbonizing.
- Support sustainable fisheries, forestry and agriculture practices, offering opportunities not only to limit GHG emissions but also, where possible, to enhance carbon sequestration, protect biological diversity and water quality.

To ensure we collect and use tax dollars better, Generation Squeeze recommends that Canada:

- Eliminate subsidies for fossil fuel industries, and fully integrate the oil and gas production sector in climate policies.
- Price pollution. This requires the introduction of either a national carbon tax or a national economy-wide cap-and-trade program. Revenue from pricing pollution can be used to reduce other taxes and/or invest in other components of a Better Generational Deal.

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### Building Political Will for a Low-carbon, High Prosperity Canada

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While numerous research networks across the country deliver scientific expertise on climate change and sustainability, the *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* report acknowledges that "information alone is not enough to trigger leadership on climate change and more effective climate change governance. It is clear that decisions are made more on the basis of intuition and values than on rational, careful consideration of costs and benefits of action" (p. 47).

As experts about the large gap between scientific evidence and public policy decisions, Generation Squeeze affirms this conclusion. We believe that this component of the report could be strengthened by adding that **government decisions respond to those who organize and show up.**

Although all Canadians over age 18 have political entitlements, generational cohorts vary significantly in the way they exercise these liberties. Data show that citizens over the age of 45 are much more likely to cast a

ballot than are citizens under age 45<sup>3</sup>; and the latter group consists frequently of parents of minors who have no voting rights. Similarly, with over 300 000 members, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) has built political clout for its constituency that is age 50+. By contrast, until Generation Squeeze began first as an awareness-raising campaign in 2011, and developed into a campaign to build political power for Canadians in their 20s, 30s, 40s and their children, there had been no pan-Canadian, big-tent generational organization to speak up for younger Canada. We still have considerable distance to travel to catch up to CARP's membership and associated political clout.

This age pattern in voting and political organizing poses a major barrier to the translation of research about climate change into government budgets and policy adaptations, because the risks of inaction to reduce GHGs are borne primarily by younger stakeholders, and the families they will be raising in the middle of this century. So long as Canadians under 45 are less likely to vote and organize in between elections, all political parties are less likely to design platforms that adapt for younger generations. This pattern is evident not only in regards to Canada's tepid commitment to climate change policy in comparison to international leaders, but also in regards to other policy areas related to population health. For instance, groups like Global AgeWatch<sup>4</sup> rank Canada among the top countries worldwide for aging because of spending on medical care, Old Age Security and the Canada Public Pension Plan. By contrast, groups like UNICEF<sup>5</sup> rank Canada

among the least generous Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for investments in the generation raising young children, judging that our parental leave and childcare services fall below international standards.

In order for Canada to implement *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars'* recommendations, Generation Squeeze recommends that the authors urge **greater attention be paid to the implementation of interventions designed to increase the power of younger generations in the world of politics.** Certainly, they have the most to lose.

Our organization is at the forefront of one such intervention, and is enthusiastic about the opportunities to partner with authors from Sustainable Canada Dialogues to scale it up.

Consistent with the report's emphasis on the "need to establish organizations focused on the transition to low-carbon pathways" (p. 47), we are building a non-profit lobby designed to grow one million Generation Squeeze supporters by the medium-term. As our network grows, we will bring to the world of politics the one commodity that can out-compete money in a democracy – genuine person power.

To do this, we are organizing allies in part according to their residence in electoral districts. Once our membership is sufficiently large, we intend to approach all candidates running for office, particularly in districts that historically have close election results. In a strictly non-partisan way, we will share with all parties that: 1) the last election was won or lost by less than, for example, 1500 votes;

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3 Uppal, S. and LaRochelle-Côté, S. (2012). Factors associated with voting. *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, 1-15.

4 Global AgeWatch (2013). *Global AgeWatch Index 2013*, <http://www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/>, accessed on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

5 UNICEF (2008). *The child care transition: A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries*. In *Innocenti Report Card 8*, UNICEF Inno-

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centi Research Centre, Florence, [http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc8\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc8_eng.pdf), accessed on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009.

that 2) Generation Squeeze has thousands of allies in their district; and that 3) we only need to move a fraction of those allies to make the difference between winning and losing their local election. As we operationalize this strategy in upwards of 20 ridings, we will build an organization that can make the difference between winning and losing a majority government provincially and/or federally. We will use the resulting influence to transform existing priorities articulated by political parties across the political spectrum in ways that ensure their platforms embrace components of a Better Generational Deal so that Canada works for all generations.

By adopting the recommendations from *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* as part of our vision for a Better Generational Deal, Generation Squeeze is an intervention designed to grow political will in support of the scholarly consensus articulated in that report. This is a variation on the report's emphasis regarding "social mobilisation" (p. 48) – one that not only focuses on behaviour change to promote sustainability at the individual level, but also to increase our collective capacity to promote sustainability at the population level.

In keeping with the authors' focus on "the importance of triggering a values shift in response to climate change" (p. 47), Generation Squeeze recommends that Sustainable Canada Dialogues contribute to telling a **broader narrative about generational prosperity and intergenerational fairness.**

Generation Squeeze organizes its political mobilization activity around a communications narrative that has been expertly shaped in the light of Canadian values about interge-

nerational fairness, and emerging concerns that younger Canadians are inheriting a socioeconomic and environmental standard of living that is deteriorating compared to the one their parents inherited a generation ago in Canada. Accordingly, we purposefully link interests and values related to sustainability with concerns that people feel immediately in their wallets as a result of stagnant wages, high housing costs, less time and larger government debts. This innovative communication frame marries the environmental and economic, often in deeply personal ways for people, and can complement existing communication strategies within green environmental movements. Specifically, our plan to build political will in support of a low-carbon, high prosperity Canada makes available a unique opportunity to attract the interest, time, and eventually clout, of a broader constituency of Canadians who have not yet connected the dots between the risks of climate change with other components of the time, money and service squeeze they are feeling more immediately in their lives.

In sum, Sustainable Canada Dialogues has identified the policy adaptations that will put Canada on a secure path to a low-carbon, high prosperity future. It is time to embed these recommendations in interventions designed to grow the political will required to achieve their implementation. Building a national lobby for those in their 20s, 30s and 40s, along with the children they parent – one that is organized around a broad narrative of generational prosperity and fairness – can be a major contributor to building this political will. Generation Squeeze therefore welcomes the opportunity to work in collaboration with Sustainable Canada Dialogues partners in support of their inspiring vision for Canada.



ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

# SUSTAINABLE CANADA DIALOGUES

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This contribution is part of a collection of texts, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*, stemming from interactions between Sustainable Canada Dialogues, an initiative of the UNESCO-McGill Chair for Dialogues on Sustainability, and business associations, First Nations, non-governmental organizations, labour groups, institutions, organizations and private citizens.

Sustainable Canada Dialogues is a voluntary initiative that mobilizes over 60 researchers from every province in Canada, representing disciplines across engineering, sciences and social sciences. We are motivated by a shared view that putting options on the table will stimulate action and is long overdue in Canada.

Together, the contributions enrich the scope of possible solutions and show that Canada is brimming with ideas, possibilities and the will to act. The views expressed in *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* are those of the contributors, and are not necessarily endorsed by Sustainable Canada Dialogues.

We thank all contributors for engaging in this dialogue with us to help reach a collective vision of desired pathways to our futures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

[sustainablecanadialogues.ca/en/scd/acting-on-climate-change](https://sustainablecanadialogues.ca/en/scd/acting-on-climate-change)