

Climate Change and Well-Being: Health, Safety, Place, Self, and Belonging

Research Brief

For communities · For practitioners · For policymakers

1. Why this matters

Climate change doesn't just alter landscapes — it reshapes lives and communities. It affects how safe people feel, where they belong, and how connected they are to others. This research shows how climate change influences human well-being in its broadest sense, highlighting that emotional, social, and psychological impacts are just as important as physical ones.

2. What the study looked at

The researchers examined how climate change affects well-being through three main pathways:

1. Material impacts – physical changes such as damage to homes, loss of livelihoods, or disrupted access to health and social services.
2. Information – how messages about climate risks shape people's perceptions, fears, hopes, and sense of control.
3. Policy responses – how adaptation and mitigation strategies influence social relations, identity, and belonging.

Drawing on social and environmental psychology and applied social science, the study identified five core dimensions of well-being that are affected by climate change: *Health, Safety, Place, Self, and Belonging*.

Figure: The three pathways through which climate change affects five dimensions of well-being.

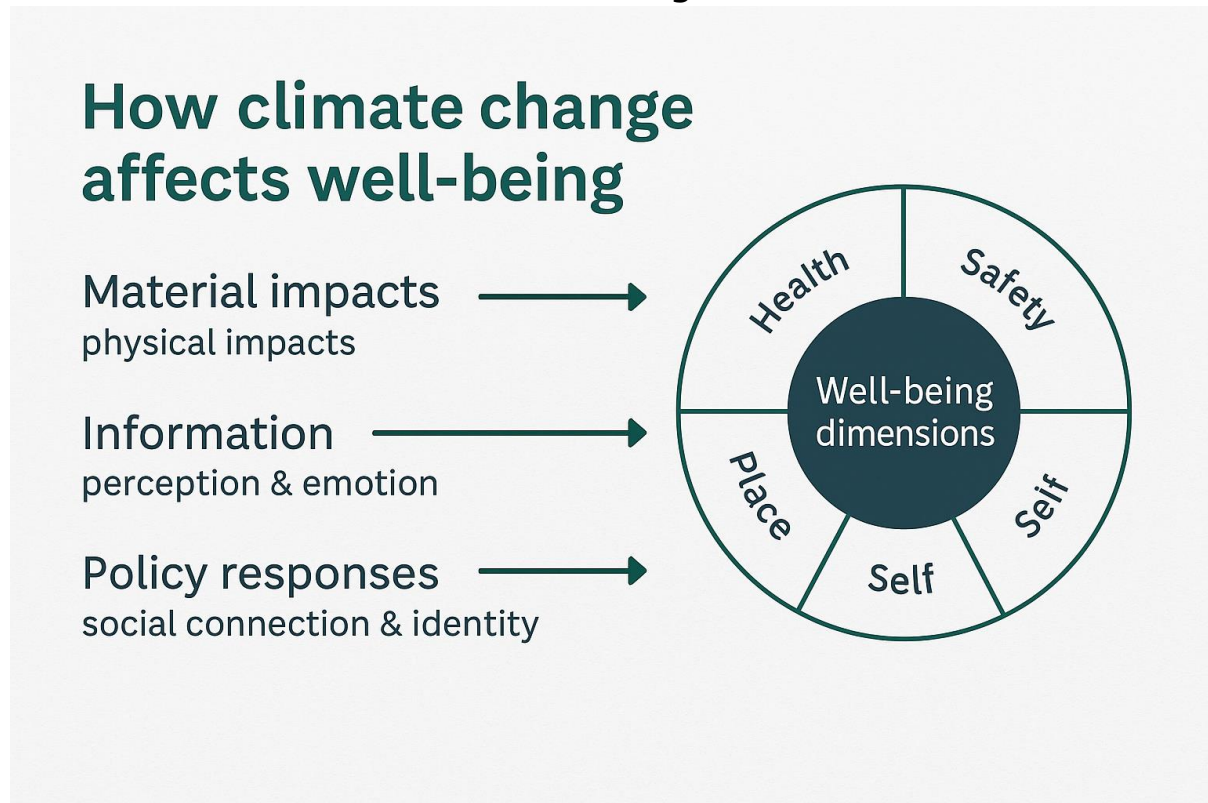


Diagram showing how material impacts, information, and policy responses influence five dimensions of well-being: health, safety, place, self, and belonging

3. Key findings

- **Well-being is multi-dimensional.** It includes physical and mental health, security, relationships, and sense of place — all of which are interconnected.
- **Climate impacts ripple through lives.** Extreme events, displacement, and policy responses affect people's feelings of stability, control, and belonging.
- **Information shapes emotions.** Risk messages that focus only on fear can increase anxiety and powerlessness, while messages that emphasise agency and solutions build hope and self-efficacy.

- **Policies can help or harm.** Policies can shape how people experience change – they can support well-being when they include people’s sense of identity and place, or undermine it when they don’t.
- **Inclusion matters.** When communities have voice and agency in adaptation planning, the process strengthens belonging and trust.

4. What this means for practice

- **Design adaptation for people as well as places.** Consider psychological and social outcomes — not only physical safety.
- **Co-create solutions.** Involve communities from the start to ensure adaptation supports local identity, culture, and continuity.
- **Balance risk communication.** Pair warnings with actionable steps to reduce helplessness and build shared agency.
- **Protect non-economic values.** Recognise losses of heritage, identity, and belonging as equally important to economic measures.
- **Invest in connection.** Strengthen social networks, participation, and collective resilience as key adaptation assets.

5. Considerations & limits

The research draws on multiple global contexts, so experiences will vary by culture, geography, and governance. Outcomes depend on local histories, community structures, and power relations — findings should always be interpreted within context.

6. How we're using this at Healthy Adaptations

We are building these insights into the Healthy Adaptations Toolkit – the heart of this hub - which brings together research, practical tools & metrics, and lived examples of adaptation in practice.

The toolkit is continually growing: over time, it will include reflective checklists, communication guides, podcasts, and community case studies showing how adaptation can strengthen well-being, identity, and belonging in real contexts.

7. How you can use this

If you're a community group: Use the five well-being domains — health, safety, place, self, belonging — to guide local discussions and share what matters most to you and your community.

If you're a practitioner: Incorporate well-being indicators into project plans and evaluations to capture social and emotional outcomes.

If you're a policymaker: Ensure adaptation policies and funding recognise both economic and non-economic losses, and promote processes that build belonging and agency.

8. Source

Adger, W. N., Barnett, J., Heath, S., & Jarillo, S. (2023). *Climate change affects multiple dimensions of well-being through impacts, information and policy responses. Nature Climate Change.*

