As the early spring storm raged outside, the mayor of Toronto burst into the room where 90 community leaders and local government officials had convened. The deluge had caused major flooding throughout the city. They needed a game plan.

You didn’t miss the news—there was no recent flood. This was “Resilientville,” a role-playing exercise hosted earlier this month at Toronto’s Centre for Social Innovation. The “mayor of Toronto” was really a member of Faith and the Common Good, a community service non-profit. The organization has been hosting simulations all over Ontario, helping cities become more resilient to natural disaster.

Resilience is the ability to rebound from hardships and setbacks, often associated with workers, athletes or young children.

But resilience applies as much to cities as it does to individuals, especially with the growing threat of climate change. Weather-related disasters have increased by 14 per cent globally over the past 20 years. Municipalities must be prepared to face and overcome threats like flooding, or the 2016 Alberta wildfires.

Four Canadian cities—Calgary, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver—have joined an innovative global project designed to strengthen the world’s metropolises.

Launched by the Rockefeller Foundation, 100 Resilient Cities helps urban centres work with other governments and community groups, and learn from cities around the world to identify potential threats and prepare for them. Participating cities receive funding to create a high-level Chief Resiliency Officer role in their governments. They also have access to an estimated US $400 million in services—consulting, research, and engineering assistance—donated by companies around the world.

We spoke to city officials in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal about the biggest threats they foresee. Toronto cites extreme weather, such as heat waves and ice storms. Vancouver leaders fret about rising sea levels, as well the ever-present fear of a major earthquake. Montreal is concerned with crumbling infrastructure, with its old roads and bridges.

In particular, Canada’s biggest cities are thinking about how these challenges might affect their most vulnerable citizens.

Toronto, for example, is considering “cool rooms” for high rises without central air in low-income areas, preparing for heat waves. In Vancouver, residents in the vulnerable downtown east side often can’t afford internet access. So the city is seeking alternate ways to share life-saving information offline in those districts in the event of an emergency.

The 100 Resilient Cities initiative also encourages resiliency beyond prepping for disasters. For instance, how well a city addresses other non-emergency issues, like homelessness, impacts how well it can withstand—and recover from—sudden shocks. A city’s most vulnerable residents tend to be most affected.

Canadians can help make their communities resilient. Get together with your neighbours and make a community emergency plan. Identify the most vulnerable in your neighbourhood—seniors living alone, large families with young children—and create a volunteer network to check up on them when extreme weather strikes. If you own a business, consider how you could help out—for example, a restaurant might prepare meals for residents stranded in emergency shelters.

Strengthening communities against unexpected shocks benefits everyone.