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**Supporting Wildfire
Preparedness Amongst Migrant
Workers in the Okanagan**

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DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTEXT

RAMA (Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture) is a migrant justice collective that advocates for Latin American and Caribbean migrant farm workers in the unceded Syilx and Secwepemc territories of the Okanagan Valley. As a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization, RAMA works to build more socially just and inclusive communities through political advocacy, direct support, and public awareness campaigns.

The Okanagan region is prone to devastating wildfires, which pose a significant threat to the vulnerable migrant worker population. RAMA recognizes the need to provide clear, accessible information to help these workers protect themselves during such emergencies. By creating a visual leaflet on wildfire safety, RAMA aims to empower migrant workers and ensure their wellbeing in the face of this environmental challenge. This effort is part of RAMA's broader mission to stand in solidarity with marginalized communities and challenge the systemic inequities they face.

WHAT IS THE EQUITY CHALLENGE?

Temporary migrant workers in agriculture, hotels, and construction primarily from the Caribbean and Latin America, face significant challenges including unequal access to healthcare. These challenges are often aggravated by their labour arrangements, immigration status, employment conditions and language barriers.

The poor working conditions these workers endure have been described as 'contemporary forms of slavery' highlighting the unequal power relations between the workers, their employers and the state. Unlike other citizens, migrant workers particularly in agriculture are compelled to work outdoors even during wildfires, sometimes without proper protective equipment to safeguard them from air pollution and heat stress.

In pursuit of social justice, RAMA aims to empower these workers with knowledge on how to prepare for and manage their health during wildfire events.

WHAT WAS THE EQUITY RESPONSE?

Our group's initiative is a direct response to the equity challenge faced by migrant agricultural workers in Kelowna. Unlike other workers, agricultural workers are often expected to continue working even during wildfires. This disparity highlights the inequitable treatment they experience, which is exacerbated by their lower literacy levels, immigrant status, and lack of legal protections in Canada.

- Agricultural workers, predominantly from Mexico, face unique vulnerabilities due to their immigrant status and low literacy levels. By providing health education resources in

Spanish and ensuring the materials are easy to understand, we are directly addressing these vulnerabilities and empowering workers with the knowledge to protect themselves.

- Many agricultural workers are not afforded the same protections and access to information as other workers. By making health resources readily available and understandable, we are promoting equitable access to critical information that can help safeguard their health during wildfires.
- Our efforts also aim to raise awareness about the inequitable conditions these workers face. By highlighting the need for specialized resources and advocating for their rights, we are working towards a more equitable treatment of agricultural workers in Canada.
- Providing these workers with the tools and knowledge to protect themselves during wildfires is a step towards empowering them. It allows them to take proactive measures for their health and safety, reducing their reliance on employers who may take advantage of their immigrant status and lack of legal protections.

In summary, our response to the equity-to-action challenge involves not only meeting the immediate health needs of agricultural workers during wildfires but also addressing the broader inequities they face. By providing accessible and tailored health resources, we are working towards a more equitable and just environment for these vulnerable workers.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Equity-focused knowledge translation requires actively listening to the desires and priorities of communities. This is even more crucial when researchers find themselves collaborating with groups or populations with whom they do not share lived experiences. In our assigned case study, no member of our group had conducted prior research with migrant workers, and none of us were local to Kelowna. These conditions of our engagement served as a constant reminder that researchers doing KTEA embrace a position of humility vis à vis community partners.

Some group members expressed initial moral distress faced with RAMA's "ask" for a pamphlet that did not aim, and as such would not reduce employer and other pressures on migrant workers to continue working in unsafe conditions (e.g. in wildfire smoke). Further discussion yielded agreement that attending to the immediate needs facing this group did not negate that structural change remained necessary, and could be considered essential within a KTEA approach. Centering partner priorities increases the relevance of KTEA work, while demonstrating respect and trust for partners' knowledge.

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