

## ***More Action Needed to Support Health Promoting Energy Policy***

**TORONTO April 16, 2018** – The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is calling on all political parties to commit to tangible actions that can support Ontario’s transition to a healthier and cleaner low carbon electricity system, saying action is needed now to improve health and address climate change.

The call comes following Premier Wynn’s bilateral meeting today with California Governor Jerry Brown as well as the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario’s (ECO) recent 2018 Energy Conservation Progress Report.

OPHA’s report, *Beyond Coal: Power, Public Health and the Environment* called for action on three fronts: the phasing out of coal-fired power plants; encouraging energy conservation; and promoting renewable energy. While the phasing out of coal was an important step, OPHA agrees with Ontario’s Environmental Commissioner that more needs to be done.

“The coal phase-out went a long way to improving Ontario’s air quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change – both important issues for public health,” said OPHA Executive Director Pegeen Walsh. “But more needs to be done-and soon.”

As the province heads towards an election, the OPHA urges all political parties to support actions that can:

- further reduce air pollutants from electricity generation;
- increase energy conservation and renewable energy; and,
- reduce other sources of air pollution, most importantly traffic-related air pollution.

As noted in the ECO Report, the City of Toronto’s estimated a significant drop in air pollution between 2004 and 2014 when the last coal plant was shut down. However, since that time the levels have remained roughly the same, with emissions from vehicles being the pollutants of concern. Air pollution still contributes to 1,300 premature deaths per year in Toronto.

To address this issue, the OPHA urges all political parties to give priority to reducing exposure to traffic related air pollution. Specific actions that can make a difference include supporting:

- public transit, sustainable and active forms of transportation, and electrification of vehicles;
- complete communities and a built environment that reduces reliance on single-occupancy vehicles; and
- land use planning policies that protect sensitive populations from sources of pollution such as high traffic corridors.

In 2005, Ontario estimated that air pollution from its coal plants were responsible for over 600 premature deaths, 900 hospital admissions, and 1,000 emergency room visits, each year. These health impacts were valued at \$3 billion per year.

“The evidence is clear that air pollutants such as fine particulate matter, ground level ozone, nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide have profound impacts on cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and cancer”, Walsh noted. OPHA applauds the ECO for drawing attention to the critical links between health, the environment and the generation of electricity and for emphasizing that “good public policy should be based on facts”.

Be it energy, climate change or land-use and transportation planning policies, Walsh emphasized that “a health-in-all-policies approach would lead to government decisions that put health costs and benefits front and centre, promote cross government action and improve health and wellbeing”.

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