



Ontario Public Health Association
l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
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**Submission to the Ontario
Ministry of Environment,
Conservation and Parks:
Consultation on
Made-in-Ontario Climate
Change Plan**

November 16, 2018

Overview

The Ontario Public Health Association has prepared this submission in response to the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks' consultation on a new climate change plan for Ontario.

OPHA is pleased to see that the Ontario Government is committed to creating a climate change plan that is focussed on these key areas:

1. Understanding the effects of climate change in our communities to better prepare and strengthen our resiliency;
2. Ensuring that polluters are held accountable and creating dedicated measures to reduce GHG emissions;
3. Establishing an Emission Reduction Fund that will be invested in solutions to reduce emissions; and
4. Solutions that put people first.

OPHA has formulated the following recommendations to support these efforts. These recommendations are further expanded in sections 1 to 4 below.

OPHA recommends that the Ontario Government:

- Support the current evidence-based work of public health units across Ontario to assess health vulnerabilities to the local impacts of climate change.
- Include all provincial ministries in its development and implementation of the Ontario Climate Change Plan, and place a strong emphasis on collaborating across sectors to advance successful policies and programs, avoid duplication and ensure efficiencies.
- Through the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and involvement of Public Health Ontario, actively support climate change health vulnerability and adaptation assessments at the local level.
- Ensure that the Ontario Climate Change Plan includes a plan to communicate evidence-based messaging on health protection and health promotion relating to climate change.
- Regulate, incentivize, and encourage GHG emission reductions, through the most effective, evidence-based solutions such as carbon pricing.
- Establish a strong climate change plan with clear actions to mitigate climate change and set aggressive GHG reduction targets that show Ontario as a leader in both combating climate change and advancing innovation that will lead us into a sustainable and prosperous future.
- Ensure that actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions address the primary sources of carbon pollution in Ontario – transportation, industry, and buildings.

- Report annually on the progress of the government's climate change policy, in terms of GHG emission reductions relative to targets established, measures, actions and programs to adapt to climate change, and supports provided to vulnerable Ontarians.
- Direct the Emission Reduction Fund towards programs that further reduce greenhouse gas emissions and have multiple health, environmental and economic co-benefits.
- In developing and implementing a climate change plan for Ontario, give priority consideration to the multiple ways in which the health and well-being of Ontarians will be impacted by climate change.
- Consider ecosystem health and its linkages to human health when developing and implementing climate change actions.

1. Understanding the Effects of Climate Change on the Health of our Communities to Better Prepare and Strengthen our Resiliency

OPHA recommends that the Ontario Government support the current evidence-based work of public health units across Ontario to assess health vulnerabilities to the local impacts of climate change. Combined with the efforts of local municipalities, conservation authorities, businesses, institutions and community stakeholders, these climate change vulnerability and adaptation assessments are an effective and efficient way of prioritizing actions and allocating resources where they are most needed.

There is well documented scientific evidence on the health impacts of climate change. Climate change has contributed to an increase in heat-related mortality and morbidity and expanded the range of vector-borne diseases (e.g. Lyme Disease and West Nile Virus). Wildfires and extreme heat can increase concentrations of air pollutants that contribute to and exacerbate cardiovascular and respiratory disease. Flooding and other extreme weather events are increasingly recognized as a factor that contributes to negative mental health outcomes. These are just a few examples of the health impacts of climate change.

Costs to the health care system from these and other climate related health impacts will continue to increase unless urgent action is taken to mitigate and adapt to climate change. OPHA is especially concerned that climate change may worsen existing health inequities by increasing the health burden on the already vulnerable groups such as children, seniors, the chronically ill, low income and homeless, and disabled people.

Recent events such as the extreme temperatures that Ontario experienced this past summer, the increasing number and extent of forest fires, tornadoes and other wind events, toxic algal blooms in surface water, and the damage from heavy rainfall and flood events illustrate that climate change is already having a severe and widespread health and economic impact on Ontarians.

To get a better understanding of the extent of these impacts on local populations, public health units across Ontario are conducting climate change vulnerability assessments, engaging a wide range of community stakeholders, gathering data and monitoring trends in climate change and associated human health impacts. Recognizing that climate change will impact our most vulnerable populations, health units are including a health equity assessment in addressing climate change health impacts. "Health equity means that all people can reach their full health

potential and are not disadvantaged from attaining it because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class, socioeconomic status or other socially determined circumstance” (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, Ontario Public Health Standards, 2018).

The work of local public health units and those of various local agencies including municipalities, conservation authorities, businesses and institutions will be instrumental in helping individuals, communities, businesses and local governments prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The Provincial Government’s support for these collaborative climate change adaptation efforts is vital and urgently needed as we increasingly experience climate change health impacts across Ontario.

OPHA recommends that the Ontario Climate Change Plan include all provincial ministries in its development and implementation, and that the province place a strong emphasis on collaborating across sectors to advance successful policies and programs, avoid duplication and ensure efficiencies.

OPHA also recommends that the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, with the support of Public Health Ontario, actively support climate change health vulnerability and adaptation assessments at the local level by conducting/coordinating province-wide research that can inform local assessments, encourage data collection and data sharing and ensure that the Ontario Climate Change Plan includes a plan to communicate evidence-based messaging on health protection and health promotion relating to climate change.

2. Ensuring Polluters are Held Accountable and Creating Dedicated Measures Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

OPHA recommends that the Ontario Government regulate, incentivize, and encourage GHG emission reductions, through the most effective, evidence-based solutions such as carbon pricing. The Ontario Government needs to institute a regime that ensures polluters pay and that innovative sustainable technologies are supported across Ontario. In addition, Ontario’s most vulnerable populations (e.g. low-income Ontarians) need to not only be protected but benefit, either through tax breaks, rebates, transfer payments or other mechanisms. The implementation of a revenue neutral carbon tax, as experience in British Columbia shows, can provide an incentive to reduce carbon emissions without resulting in an increase in the overall level of taxation.

The polluter pay approach ensures that those who produce pollution should bear the cost of the health and environmental damage created by that pollution. The evidence is clear that carbon pollution has an enormous cost and burden on our health, our environment and our economy. Regulating carbon pollution while at the same time supporting businesses to find cost effective ways of reducing emissions can achieve significant results in Ontario’s efforts to address climate change and support sustainable ways of living. By putting a direct or indirect price on climate pollution, the Ontario Government can help advance efforts to achieve a strong, clean economy – supporting innovative solutions, realizing cost savings for businesses, and creating valuable and meaningful jobs for Ontarians.

OPHA urges the Ontario Government to establish a strong climate change plan with clear actions to mitigate climate change and set aggressive GHG reduction targets that show Ontario as a leader in both combating climate change and advancing innovation that will lead us into a sustainable and prosperous future. The targets for GHG emission reductions must be science-based in order to limit global temperature increases to 2°C, the threshold that the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has identified as necessary for “avoiding catastrophic climate change.” To be effective, the targets must be backed by strong, sector-specific actions that provide a clear explanation of how each action will achieve the stated results.

It is crucial that actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions address the primary sources of carbon pollution in Ontario – transportation, industry, and buildings. The transportation sector is the largest contributor to Ontario’s GHG emissions at 35%, followed by industry at 30%, buildings 21%, agriculture 8%, waste 4% and electricity at 3%. (*Environmental Commissioner of Ontario – 2018 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Progress Report*).

OPHA also recommends that the Ontario Government report annually on the progress of the government’s climate change policy, in terms of GHG emission reductions relative to targets established, measures, actions and programs to adapt to climate change, and supports provided to vulnerable Ontarians. An effective, accountable Climate Change Plan needs to include indicators, including health indicators, that are tracked over time and publicly reported.

3. Establishing an Emission Reduction Fund that will be Invested in Solutions to Reduce Emissions

OPHA urges the Ontario Government to direct the Emission Reduction Fund towards programs that further reduce greenhouse gas emissions and have multiple health, environmental and economic co-benefits – programs related to public transit, green infrastructure, energy efficiency, renewable energy projects, energy retrofits at hospitals, social housing and schools, active and sustainable transportation, including cycling infrastructure, and upgrades and replacements to public infrastructure. Examples of health co-benefits include: protection from UV radiation and extreme heat, reduced air pollutant emissions and fossil fuel consumption, reduced risk of injury, increased physical activity and active transportation and promotion of a healthier diet. An Emission Reduction Fund that is used to support individuals, agencies, businesses and communities to further reduce carbon pollution can create a healthier, sustainable and more equitable Ontario for all.

Investing in a low carbon economy makes good business sense. The International Energy Agency estimates we need \$10.5 trillion in incremental investment globally in low-carbon energy technologies and energy efficiency across all sectors including power, transport, buildings and industrial sectors by 2030. This presents a significant growth opportunity to Ontario’s economy.

An emissions reduction fund can also support communities to better adapt to climate change. Investment in and funding for solutions is needed to reduce future health and costs of adaptation. Damage to public infrastructure, homes, buildings, properties and natural resources has caused huge economic losses to individuals, businesses and government. The severe rainstorm in July 2013 has been described as the most expensive natural disaster in Ontario's history with an estimated flood and property damage of \$940 million in Toronto alone. Corporations, small businesses, and municipalities are increasingly recognizing potential liabilities and the costs of inaction. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy estimated that the economic costs of climate change in Canada will rise from about \$5 billion annually in 2020 to between \$21 and \$43 billion by 2050. Helping individual Ontarians better understand and protect themselves from climate change health impacts such as extreme heat, vector-borne diseases, air pollution, flooding and other extreme weather events will go a long way to improving health and reducing health-care costs.

4. Solutions that put People First – Prioritizing Health and Health Equity in Climate Change Planning

In developing and implementing a climate change plan for Ontario, OPHA urges the Provincial Government to consider, as a number one priority, the multiple ways in which the health and well-being of Ontarians will be impacted by climate change. Monitoring and measuring climate change health impact trends over time will help ensure that the Ontario Government is putting people first. As noted earlier, climate change is associated with increasing incidence of heat-related morbidity and mortality, increasing cardiovascular and respiratory impacts from poor air quality, spread of vector-borne diseases, risks associated with food and water contamination, morbidity and mortality associated with extreme weather events, as well as mental health impacts of emergencies and disasters. The cost to the health care system of these health impacts, in turn, impacts our economy. Populations that are healthy, secure and prepared are more resilient to the impacts of climate change, and able to contribute to a healthy, sustainable economy.

OPHA believes that climate change is one of the greatest public health challenges of our century and it is imperative to act now. While all segments of the population are affected, climate change impacts can exacerbate existing health inequalities. Research indicates that sub-populations who will be disproportionately impacted include those who already experience poor health outcomes compared to Provincial averages, as well as marginalized and vulnerable groups such as children, seniors, low income and homeless, and disabled people.

OPHA recommends that the Ontario Government consider ecosystem health and its linkages to human health when developing and implementing climate change actions.

OPHA recognizes that the health of the ecosystems on which all species rely is under threat from climate change and extreme weather events. A 2017 report prepared by EcoHealth Ontario for the Ontario Biodiversity Council describes conserving biodiversity as a public health imperative and the impacts of biological diversity, climate change and social change on human health and well-being. Climate change threatens Ontario's biodiversity while biodiversity improves Ontario's resilience and adaptability to climate change.

OPHA appreciates that many Ontarians are concerned about the future of our environment yet cannot readily identify the health impacts. We would be pleased to work with the government on a public education campaign so that Ontarians can better understand the health implications, how they can protect themselves and their loved ones, and steps they can take to reduce their carbon emissions and live their most healthy and productive lives.

Conclusion

Opportunities exist today for the provincial government to respond to climate change. Taking action to mitigate and adapt to climate change can result in multiple co-benefits to our health, improve our air quality, protect our environment and strengthen our economy. Strong climate change policy, investing in climate change solutions, and supporting vulnerable populations will ensure that Ontarians are prepared for climate change today and in the future.

OPHA and volunteers from its Environmental Health Workgroup and Built Environment Workgroup would be pleased to work with its networks, the ministry and other stakeholders to achieve these goals. For more information, please contact OPHA's Executive Director, Pegeen Walsh at: pwalsh@opha.on.ca or by calling 416 367-1281.

About OPHA

Created in 1949, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that brings together a broad spectrum of groups and individuals concerned about people's health. OPHA's members come from various backgrounds and sectors - from the various disciplines in public health, health care, academic, non-profit to the private sector. They are united by OPHA's mission of providing leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthening the impact of people, who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. This mission is achieved through professional development, information and analysis on issues effecting community and public health, access to multidisciplinary networks, advocacy on health public policy and the provision of expertise and consultation.

OPHA members have been leading change in their communities on a wide range of issues - tobacco control, poverty reduction, diabetes prevention, increased access to oral health care, supporting children and families, healthy eating and nutrition, climate change and designing walkable communities, among others.