



Ontario Public Health Association
 l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
 Established/Établi 1949

The mission of OPHA is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

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Constituent Societies

Association of Ontario
 Health Centres (AOHC)

Association of Public Health
 Epidemiologists in Ontario (APHEO)

Association of Supervisors of
 Public Health Inspectors of Ontario
 (ASPHIO)

Canadian Institute of Public Health
 Inspectors (Ontario Branch) (CIPHIO)

Community Health Nurses'
 Initiatives Group (RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario (HPO)

Ontario Association of Public
 Health Dentistry (OAPHD)

Ontario Association of Public Health
 Nursing Leaders, (OAPHNL)

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health
 (ODPH)

Ontario Society of Physical Activity
 Promoters in Public Health (OSPAPPH)

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Susanne Jakobsen
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 Climate Change and Environmental Policy Division
 Strategic Policy Branch
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Ms. Jakobsen:

RE: OPHA Response – EBR 013-1520 – Ontario's Approach to Climate Change Adaptation

The Ontario Public Health Association is pleased to see that the Provincial Government is taking steps to support climate change adaptation. As noted by Dr. Margaret Chan, previous Director-General of the World Health Organization: "Climate change is the defining issue for public health in the 21st century." While adapting to climate change requires involvement of all levels of government and various sectors including public health, municipalities, private sector and non-governmental organizations, it is important that "health and well-being" be included in any discussion on climate change risk assessments, vulnerabilities and adaptive capacity.

Created in 1949, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a not-for-profit organization committed to 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. Our mission is achieved by providing professional development, timely information and analysis on public health issues, access to multi-disciplinary networks, advocacy on healthy public policy and expertise and consultation.

With a mandate under the Ontario Public Health Standards to address climate change health impacts, the public health sector plays an important role in supporting climate resiliency as well as identifying and mitigating community vulnerabilities. Public Health Units across Ontario are moving forward in the completion of Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessments, with some having developed comprehensive plans, including a health equityⁱ lens on vulnerable populations. OPHA and Public Health Units across Ontario are keenly aware that climate change health impacts are likely to disproportionately impact our

most vulnerable populations. The vulnerability assessments will be essential in identifying and prioritizing adaptation strategies that support communities and in particular those individuals most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Additional detail is required to fully understand the Provincial approach to climate change adaptation

It is recommended that additional details be provided in the following areas:

- Foundational principles and objectives to guide the Province in addressing climate adaptation including health equity and the social determinants of health
- Scope of work to support the New Climate Change Organization
- Purpose and scope of province-wide risk assessments
- Acknowledgement and commitment to funding provincial and municipal adaptation actions required to increase adaptive capacity of our most vulnerable populations, retrofit communities and increase resiliency

The Province is encouraged to undertake broad consultation with stakeholders prior to finalizing the Provincial approach to climate change adaptation.

A new climate change organization

- We support a province-wide climate change organization that can collect, analyze and disseminate climate projection data and adaptation information.
- It is important that this organization include both the municipal and public health sector and seek out supports from experts on the human health impacts of climate change, such as Public Health Ontario, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- The new climate change organization could also be responsible for developing an evaluation plan for the Climate Change Adaptation Plan with indicators of success including health based indicators

Provincial climate change risk assessment

- We agree on the need for a province-wide climate change risk assessment. As noted in Ontario's Approach to Climate Change Adaptation, the risk assessment should help identify and inform action on "...specific regions and populations that are more vulnerable". It is important that this risk assessment include a human health vulnerability assessment and builds on the work and approaches that have been initiated and/or completed locally.
- Health equity must be included in discussions about climate change impacts. While all populations will be impacted, those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change must be a priority in terms of identifying and addressing impacts, for example, seniors, children, and low income families.
- In order to identify and prioritize actions on climate change it is also important to understand the adaptive capacity of our communities and our systems. Thus, the provincial climate change risk assessment should include not only an assessment of current and future impacts and vulnerabilities but also an assessment of adaptive capacity at the regional and local levels. The provincial assessment should create a framework within which regional and local assessments can be integrated.
- The Province has indicated that it will undertake province-wide vulnerability assessments across multiple sectors including agriculture, infrastructure, ecosystems, public health and safety, business

and the financial sectors to be completed in 2018. Recognizing the importance of identifying risk and prioritizing action, Regional staff recommends the Province use a phased approach to ensure assessments are of sufficient scope and depth of analysis to be informative.

A whole-of-government approach

- Climate change is, and will continue to impact all sectors in our community, our environment and our economies. As such it is important that action on climate change is coordinated across all Provincial ministries and between all levels of government. As noted in the 2016 Provincial Minister Mandate letters, the Premier has asked all Ministers to “work closely with your Cabinet colleagues to deliver positive results on initiatives that cut across several ministries, such as our Climate Change Action Plan..”. While climate change was identified as a priority area for over a dozen ministries it is important that this be identified within all ministries, including the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.
- The Provincial Approach notes that Government leadership on climate change adaptation is critical for the future financial and economic well-being of our province. It should be noted here that it is also critical for the health and well-being of our residents.
- Under this whole-of-government approach, the Province should address climate change adaptation in an integrated and holistic manner. A review of legislative requirements, policy direction and guidance developed across all ministries will be required to avoid competing requirements and ensure consistency of approach. Involvement of the municipal sector would also help ensure that local programs and policies contribute to meeting provincial objectives.

Raising public awareness

- A vital first step in climate change adaptation is engaging the public and decision makers at all levels. In order to engage the public, it is important that the key messages are based on scientific evidence, include the human health risk with an emphasis on populations most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and provide actions that individuals can take to protect their health and increase resiliency to climate change. It is noted that the current messaging embedded within the Province webpage – “How we’re adapting to climate change/Understand the impacts of climate change in Ontario” provides very little emphasis on the human health impacts of climate change, and rather, focuses on the economic impacts.
- It is essential that Ontario residents understand the health effects of a changing climate and action individuals can take to protect themselves. The Province has a key role to play in this area and should provide resources and templates to drive consistent messaging. To deliver locally relevant communications, the Province should utilize partnerships with municipalities, public and non-profit agencies, and industry organizations as channels for delivery of consistent messaging relevant to the local situation. OPHA is happy to support the province in these endeavours.
- From a health equity perspective, it will be important to provide messaging of potential human health risks associated with climate change. It will also be important to communicate with those populations most vulnerable to impacts associated with climate change and to provide concrete actions that individuals can take to protect their health and increase resiliency.

OPHA is supportive of the provincial approach to climate change adaptation. The health co-benefits of this approach can include better air quality, reduced urban heat islands, increased community resiliency, mitigation of climate-sensitive infectious and vector-borne diseases, increased physical activity, general wellbeing and lower health care costs. We look forward to identifying how we can work with the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, to support the successful implementation of the Ontario Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

Sincerely,



Pegeen Walsh
Executive Director, OPHA

ⁱ Health equity means that all people can reach their full health potential and should not be disadvantaged from attaining it because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class, socioeconomic status or other socially determined circumstance. Health equity “involves the fair distribution of resources needed for health, fair access to the opportunities available, and fairness in the support offered to people when ill” While striving to improve health outcomes for all population groups, the pursuit of health equity seeks to reduce the excess burden of ill health among socially and economically disadvantaged populations.