

MIDDLESEX-LONDON BOARD OF HEALTH

REPORT NO. 12-24

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health
Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer
DATE: 2024 February 15

MIDDLESEX-LONDON HEALTH UNIT APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 12-24 re: "Middlesex-London Health Unit Approach to Climate Change Action" for information.

Report Highlights

- Climate change is already having impacts on human health in Middlesex-London, and these impacts are expected to increase over time.
- The MLHU addresses climate change, including through both adaptation and mitigation activities, in the work of many teams across the organization and utilizing a wide variety of interventions
- In the next 1-2 years, the MLHU will focus on advancing work on surveillance of climate change impacts on human health and communicating risks to the public and decision-makers.

Background

Climate change can impact human health in a wide variety of ways, including exposure injuries to extreme temperatures, injuries related to extreme weather, vector-borne diseases, respiratory disease related to poorer air quality, water-borne illness, food insecurity, and mental health impacts. While everyone is at risk, there are some who are at greater risk to these health impacts such as children, older adults, those with pre-existing health conditions and those who are already socially and economically disadvantaged.

Climate change impacts can also vary by region. In 2014, the MLHU supported an assessment of the Middlesex-London region to determine possible vulnerabilities from climate change and provide recommendations for adaptation. On December 18, 2014, the MLHU Board of Health endorsed Report 074-14, directing staff to follow through on recommendations outlined in the 2014 Assessment of Vulnerability to the Health Impacts of Climate Change in Middlesex-London, including:

1. Development of a climate change and health action plan;
2. Education and outreach related to the impacts of climate change;
3. Evaluating adaptations to determine effectiveness of efforts to reduce risks of climate change;
4. Continued surveillance and monitoring of climate sensitive diseases;
5. Developing a greater understanding of how urban and rural vulnerabilities may differ in the Middlesex-London Region; and
6. Development of policies and programs that address multiple risks to help deal with uncertainties of a changing climate and work towards adaptation and mitigation.

While the report was originally prepared by the MLHU in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada, the recommendations extended beyond the work of the MLHU alone.

In the context of these previous commitments, a fulsome review of the mandate and role of local public health agencies within the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) was recently conducted to identify gaps and opportunities for further action. Within the OPHS, direction is given to local public health agencies to engage in climate change action, within the Healthy Environments and Climate Change Guidelines, 2018. Reference to climate change and its health impacts is also linked to many other protocols and guidelines within the OPHS.

The MLHU Approach to Climate Change Action

Given the wide variety of health impacts that climate change can have, climate change action is spread across the MLHU. Multiple teams are involved in climate change work, directly and indirectly, within the following programs:

- Health Hazards;
- Healthy Environments and Climate Change;
- Active Transportation and Built Environment;
- Ultraviolet Radiation and Sun Safety;
- Vector-Borne Diseases;
- Food Safety;
- Drinking Water;
- Recreational Water;
- Food Systems and Nutrition;
- Mental Health.

The work within these programs addresses both climate change mitigation and adaptation. Within these programs, the interventions utilized to address climate change include: surveillance, communication and social marketing, education and skill building, health public policy development, community mobilization and partnerships, inspections, investigations, vector control, and case, contact and outbreak management.

Since the 2014 vulnerability assessment, progress has been made on the recommendations, both internally to the MLHU and in collaboration with partners. On April 23, 2019, the City of London declared a climate emergency. Over the last 5 years, the MLHU has actively given input into subsequent plans and reports developed by the City of London, including the 2022 [Climate Emergency Action Plan](#). Internally, the MLHU has taken a particularly active role in moving the work of #2, 4, and 6 forward, with continued efforts in these areas being prioritized for the next year. The MLHU will continue to explore the ability to fulfill recommendations #1, 3, and 5 in future years, which will require ongoing close collaboration with community partners.

Next Steps

The MLHU will continue addressing the health impacts of climate change, particularly looking in the next 1-2 years to advance work in population health assessment and surveillance and communication of these health risks.

This report was written by the Associate Medical Officer of Health.



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This report refers to the following principle(s) set out in Policy G-490, Appendix A:

- The Healthy Environments and Climate Change Guideline as outlined in the [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services and Accountability](#).
- The following goal or direction from the [Middlesex-London Health Unit's Strategic Plan](#):
 - Goal: Program Excellence - Our public health programs are effective, grounded in evidence and equity
 - Objective: Define what we do and do it well

This topic has been reviewed to be in alignment with goals under the Middlesex-London Health Unit's [Anti-Black Racism Plan](#) and [Taking Action for Reconciliation](#), specifically several recommendations under the Assess and Report section of the ABRP, and the Research section of the TARP.