



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

DATE: 2014 December 18

2014 ASSESSMENT OF VULNERABILITY TO THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN MIDDLESEX-LONDON

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health direct staff to follow through on the recommendations from the 2014 “Assessment of Vulnerability to the Health Impacts of Climate Change in Middlesex-London” report.

Key Points

- Staff of the Environmental Health Team partnered with Health Canada’s Climate Change and Health Office to complete the [Assessment of Vulnerability to the Health Impacts of Climate Change in Middlesex-London](#) which was released on December 2nd.
- A draft of the report was used to generate discussion and to help develop recommendations for future action at a climate change forum in the Spring attended by a variety of stakeholders and partners.
- MLHU staff can play a key role in implementing the recommendations and helping London and Middlesex adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Background

Climate change poses a wide range of risks to health from a variety of potential impacts including extreme weather events and natural hazards, air quality, stratospheric ozone depletion, and waterborne, foodborne, and vector-borne diseases. Recent events such as flooding in Manitoba (2011), Calgary (2013), and Toronto (2013), extreme heat events in Montreal (2009), and wildfires in northern Ontario (2011), demonstrate the very severe impacts climate-related events can have on communities. The World Health Organization has called on health agencies to assess health vulnerabilities to climate change and take proactive adaptive actions.

The Ontario Public Health Standards requires Ontario’s Boards of Health to ensure that the public is aware of health protection and prevention activities related to health hazards and to ensure their community partners have the information necessary to create healthy public policies related to reducing exposure to those health hazards. In particular, health units are to increase public awareness of the health risk factors associated with climate change.

Assessing Vulnerability to Climate Change in Middlesex-London

Staff of the Environmental Health Team partnered with Health Canada’s Climate Change and Health Office to complete an assessment of the health vulnerability of the residents of Middlesex-London to the impacts of climate change. [The Assessment of Vulnerability to the Health Impacts of Climate Change in Middlesex-London](#) report, released on December 2nd, indicates that the residents of Middlesex-London are vulnerable to climate change related hazards and that our vulnerability is expected to increase in the years and decades ahead. For example, older adults and those who are economically marginalized are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The number of older adults in Middlesex-

London is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades, and in recent years, the Middlesex-London area has experienced some of the highest unemployment rates in Canada.

Recommendations for Action

To complete the report, a forum was held in the Spring of this year to gather information from a variety of local, provincial and federal stakeholders, partners, and experts about how best to mitigate our vulnerability in the future. The forum gave rise to several recommendations, which are contained in the [Summary and Recommendations](#) document, in the following areas:

- **Climate Change and Health Action Plan** – Efforts to address climate change would benefit from the development of an Action Plan to direct future adaptation measures.
- **Education and Outreach** – Educating public health officials, representatives from community service organizations and the public about the dangers associated with climate change and the need to take adaptive actions is necessary.
- **Evaluating Adaptations** – Further examination of the effectiveness of efforts to reduce risks from climate change is needed.
- **Surveillance and Monitoring** – Continued surveillance and monitoring of climate sensitive diseases is needed and priority should be placed on tracking heat-related morbidity and mortality.
- **Urban and Rural Vulnerabilities** – Greater understanding is needed about how climate change and health vulnerabilities may differ between urban and rural populations and communities in the Middlesex-London Region.
- **Dealing with Uncertainty** - A significant barrier to taking action to protect people in Middlesex-London is uncertainty about future climate change, the impacts of weather variability and how to respond. Policies and programs that address multiple risks (e.g. planting trees to reduce air pollution, enhance flood prevention and drought mitigation and reduce the UHI) can mitigate the effects of this uncertainty and are beneficial as are actions that target both adaptation and greenhouse gas mitigation goals concurrently (e.g., increasing active transportation).

Conclusion

The vulnerability of Middlesex-London residents to climate change hazards such as floods, extreme heat events, air pollution and vector-borne infectious diseases is significant and growing. Consistent with our mandated responsibility contained in the Ontario Public Health Standards, MLHU staff can play a key role in implementing the recommendations contained in the *Assessment of Vulnerability to the Health Impacts of Climate Change in Middlesex-London* report, helping Middlesex-London adapt to the impacts of climate change. Staff therefore recommend that the Board of Health direct them to follow through on those recommendations.

This report was prepared by Mr. Iqbal Kalsi, Manager, Environmental Health



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<p>This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards (2014): Health Hazard Prevention and Management Standard - Requirements 1, 2, 3, and 4.</p>
