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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE:**     **Reducing Health-Related Impacts of Climate Change**

**FROM:**             Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services  
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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide an update regarding Peel Public Health’s “Reducing Health-Related Impacts of Climate Change” Strategic Priority, highlighting the ongoing need for collaboration and additional resources required to reduce health impacts and adapt to Peel’s climate emergency.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- In 2012, with assistance from Health Canada, Peel was the first public health unit in Canada to complete a Climate Change Health Vulnerability Assessment (VA). The VA assessed vulnerability to five key climate hazards impacting health in Peel and provided recommendations to increase adaptive capacity and reduce exposure to climate hazards. The VA has since been updated and is guiding Public Health’s work.
- Public Health continues to collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, in particular the Office of Climate Change and Energy Management, local municipalities and the community to provide programming and services.
- Public Health’s existing capacity is not enough to address future climate and health challenges, requiring additional resources to meet the goals of this strategic priority. As part of the 2024 budget process, Public Health will be requesting one permanent and two contract Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) to move this priority forward.

**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

In 2018, the World Health Organization stated that climate change was the greatest health challenge of the 21st century. The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada Report on the State of Public Health in Canada (October 2022) indicated that one of the greatest concerns associated with climate change is its potential to worsen existing health inequities in already at-risk populations, such as children, the elderly, socially isolated individuals, people with chronic health conditions, and socially or economically marginalized families.

As climate change impacts become more apparent, collaboration and using a health lens to inform decision making is becoming increasingly important. This year alone, Peel region has experienced multiple heat events, heavy precipitation and storms and special air quality statements issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada due to wildfires in northern Ontario and Quebec.

## **Reducing Health-Related Impacts of Climate Change**

Climate change action has been a Region of Peel priority for over a decade, and continued advocacy and leadership from all sectors within Peel is needed to build a community that is resilient to the health-related impacts of climate change. Since 2019, many actions were initiated intensifying the Region's response to climate change, including:

- Regional Council's unanimous approval of and subsequent implementation of the Climate Change Master Plan.
- The Region of Peel declaring a climate emergency which supports necessary actions to help adapt to and mitigate effects of climate change.
- The inclusion of "Reducing Health-Related Impacts of Climate Change" as a strategic priority for Public Health based on data from Public Health's "The Changing Landscape of Health in Peel. A Comprehensive Health Status Report (2019)."
- Updating Peel's Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment with additional context and up to date data.

### **a) Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment**

In 2012, with support from Health Canada, Peel was the first public health unit in Canada to complete a climate change and health VA. The VA is a living document that reflects the climate change sensitivity, exposures and adaptability of the community. Given population growth in Peel region since the development of the VA, updates were made in 2023. The updated VA provides more current information to inform how Peel can improve resiliency to the health-related impacts of climate change and guide necessary work in various public health action areas.

Peel's changing climate has the potential to affect human health through numerous pathways, including:

- Increasing heat-related morbidity and mortality.
- Exacerbating poor air quality and worsening respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.
- Increasing the risk of injuries and mortality resulting from extreme weather.
- Increasing incidence of vector-borne illnesses associated with the spread of vectors (e.g., mosquitoes and ticks) as the climate becomes more favourable to their survival.
- Increasing food and water contamination with resulting increases in illness.
- Longer summers and hotter weather increase the risk that food will become contaminated if people are not handling, storing and/or preparing food safely.

### **b) Public Health Climate Change and Health Actions**

Using the results of the VA, Public Health actions related to climate change and health seeks to:

- Broaden discussions around public health vulnerability to climate change in Peel through consultations with stakeholders and the community. This includes exploring opportunities to integrate climate change and health across programs and services and engaging in knowledge translation and education activities.

## Reducing Health-Related Impacts of Climate Change

- Participate in the Peel Community Response Table to effectively reach and support those populations that may be at greater risk for climate hazards (i.e., heat-related illness).
- Work with the community to capture social and cultural distinctions present in Peel to further inform programming and policy.
- Continue mapping population data to identify vulnerable populations and neighbourhoods that are at greater health risk to climate hazards and use the data to further inform adaptation work.
- Further identify how mental health and health equity are impacted by climate change.
- Develop implementation plans to address identified vulnerabilities including:
  - Evaluating and updating the Heat Warning Information System.
  - Planning for Extreme Heat Urgent Response.
- Continue to effectively collaborate and align efforts within the organization by working closely with the Office of Climate Change and Energy Management and Emergency Management and with external partners and agencies such as the local area municipalities, Health Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada. Examples of on-going collaborations include:
  - Participation in the Peel Climate Change Partnership.
  - Advancing health lens and climate change adaptation considerations in planning and development consultations.
  - Participation on the Health Advisory Table for the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

## RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Without additional resources and a continued collaborative effort dedicated to health and climate change action, there is considerable risk to Peel residents' health and wellbeing, increasing morbidity and mortality, and the ability for Region of Peel to effectively deliver services. Through health surveillance, urgent response planning, knowledge translation, education and collaboration, Public Health can assist in developing community resilience.

## BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

Recent legislative changes introduced by Bill 112, *The Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution) 2023*, have added a layer of uncertainty impacting Regional employees and the programs they deliver. The introduction of Bill 112 has caused increased difficulty retaining and recruiting staff.

In addition, Bill 112 comes at a time when employees are continuing to experience the impacts of COVID-19 and the pandemic response on their work and overall wellbeing, while also generating uncertainty among Peel stakeholders. The ability to meet strategic priority goals within the previously approved period could be impacted.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The 2024 budget submission will include a request for three band 7 positions; one FTE specialist to support future Public Health urgent response planning and two 13-month analyst contracts to

## **Reducing Health-Related Impacts of Climate Change**

build capacity to develop Public Health's "Reducing Health-Related Impacts of Climate Change" strategic priority.

### **CONCLUSION**

The health impacts associated with a changing climate are becoming more apparent. Without ongoing collaboration and dedicated resources to support the development of health-specific programming and policies regarding climate change, the health and wellbeing of Peel residents will continue to decline.



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Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services

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