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TO: Board of Health for the City of Ottawa

DESTINATAIRE: French Name(s)/Committee(s)/Council/Group(s)

FROM: Dr. Trevor Arnason, Medical
officer of Health

Contact :
M Kibria
Manager, Policy, Indigenous Health,
and Business Administration Support
Mohammad.kibria@ottawa.ca

EXPÉDITEUR: Dr Trevor Arnason,
médecin hygiéniste

Personne ressource :
M Kibria
Manager, Policy, Indigenous Health, and
Business Administration Support
Mohammad.kibria@ottawa.ca

DATE: November 14, 2025

14novembre 2025

FILE NUMBER: ACS#2025-OPH-EHI-0003

SUBJECT: Health Canada Funding, HealthAdapt project, Update

OBJET: Mise à jour du projet ADAPTATION Santé

PURPOSE

To provide the Board of Health with an update on the climate adaptation projects funded through Health Canada's HealthADAPT program. These projects are key initiatives of Ottawa Public Health's Strategic Goal 2 *Create Conditions to Live Well and Thrive*: Influencing changes in the built, natural, and social environments that promote health and wellbeing, and addressing the impacts of climate change. These projects also address some of the gaps identified in the

Ottawa Public Health Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessments [ACS2024-OPH-EHI-0004](#).

BACKGROUND

Recently, The World Health Organization (WHO) and the medical journal The Lancet urged recognition that health impacts from climate change should be a powerful driver to advance climate action. The WHO noted that, “the continued failure to adapt to a heating world is already having a devastating toll on human health. While at the same time, acknowledging that climate action is also the greatest health opportunity of our time.”ⁱ

The importance of climate change is reflected in the Strategic Plans of Ottawa Public Health (OPH) and the City of Ottawa. [OPH's Strategic Goal 2: To Create Conditions to Live Well and Thrive](#), is achieved through a deep collaboration with the City's Climate Resiliency Unit, through which OPH integrates a health-focused viewpoint into the City of Ottawa's climate change adaptation efforts.

In 2019, the City of Ottawa declared a climate emergency as climate change poses significant risks to Ottawa's population. More recently, the City of Ottawa's [Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) outlines the importance of climate action through its Strategic Priority “A city that is green and resilient”.

Collaboration with the City of Ottawa on Climate Actions

The City of Ottawa has made advancements on climate change adaptation in recent years and OPH has been a key player in these important projects:

- Regional climate projections that established how Ottawa's climate will change over the coming decades ([ACS2020-PIE-EDP-0014](#)).
- Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment which identified 40 high-priority risks requiring targeted action ([ACS2022-PIE-EDP-0019](#)) and integrated the findings of OPH's Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment ([CCHVA](#) infographic).
- Climate Ready Ottawa outlines a draft long-term strategy to build a climate-resilient Ottawa by 2050, supported by a five-year action plan focused on immediate priorities to address the City's top risks ([ACS2025-SI-CCR-0011](#)). OPH is closely collaborating on the development and early implementation of the Climate Resiliency Strategy (CRS).

OPH advancing recommendations from the Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment

In November 2024, OPH reported the Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessment (CCHVA) findings to the Board. The report outlined the five climate change health hazard topics: extreme heat, vector-borne diseases, wildfire smoke, food- and waterborne illness, and ultraviolet radiation. The report outlined actions for consideration for each topic. It provided an update on the actions that OPH has advanced to decrease the health-related risks of extreme heat, particularly among populations who experience disproportionate negative climate change related health impacts. This occurs when systemic inequity drives differences in exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity to climate hazards. Climate change compounds existing inequities and can increase individual and community stresses to climate hazards.

Key findings from the CCHVA related to extreme heat note that the following is needed to decrease the health-related risks: more strategies for heat protection are needed; address barriers in accessing climate adaptation resources and cooling spaces for equity-deserving groups and increase access to potable water for people experiencing homelessness.

To advance actions identified from the CCHVA, OPH successfully received Health Canada's HealthAdapt funding program (\$632,400) for 2025-2028. With this funding, OPH is implementing three climate adaptation initiatives with a goal to improve climate resilience and help reduce the health impacts on communities most susceptible to climate change. These projects, listed below, focus on developing equity-driven outreach strategies for climate adaptation messaging, cooling infrastructure, and assessing housing-based cooling solutions:

1. Equity-Focused Climate Change Communication and Engagement
2. Fire Hydrant Water Fountains with Misting Features
3. Cooling Options Analysis for Social Housing

While OPH is leading these projects, the projects are being delivered in strong partnership with other City departments. Each playing a significant role in shaping and executing the work. City partners have also been actively involved in the development and identification of the initiatives, ensuring they reflect shared priorities. Namely: Infrastructure and Water Services (IWS), Strategic Initiatives (SI), Community & Social Services (CSSD), Emergency and Protective Services (EPS), Office of the City Clerk (OCC), Recreation, Culture and Facilities Services (RCFS), and Public Information and Media (PIMR) departments.

DISCUSSION

OPH has collaboratively worked with other City departments to advance these projects.

Project 1: Equity-Focused Communication and Engagement

This project addresses gaps in existing climate change messaging, specifically in reaching communities most susceptible to climate change in an appropriate and effective way. The objectives are to reduce health disparities and build climate resilience with these communities through creating new adapted communications strategies and using new engagement tactics to share climate adaptation messaging.

The project is guided by a working group, which include representatives from the following departments: SI, EPS, CSSD, OCC, RCFS and PIMR.

The working group has identified communities most susceptible to climate change (based on a vulnerability and equity assessment), barriers to effectively reaching these communities and have developed a participatory pilot for engaging these communities with an aim to co-designing new communications and new engagement tactics with these communities. While the working group will set the direction for this project, the development, creation, and engagement of the community in developing effective communication tactics, will be informed by the community. The approach for engaging each community will be tailored communication and will expand from traditional engagement tactics and enable community groups to disseminate climate risks and adaptation actions.

A pilot of this workshop is planned for winter 2025/26. This approach aims to amplify community voices and address systemic inequities that contribute to climate vulnerability.

Project 2: Fire Hydrant Water Fountains with Misting Features

This project involves piloting fire-hydrant water fountains with the possibility of misting features in communities most susceptible to climate change. The objective is to increase access to cooling features in equity-deserving communities that lack cooling features, by providing fire-hydrant water fountains in these communities. The locations will be determined using a health-equity lens.

For this project, OPH is working in close collaboration with IWS, CSSD, SI, and the EPS departments.

An equity framework was developed to guide the site selection, incorporating criteria such as the Neighbourhood Equity Index, population density, age and immigration rates, tree canopy coverage, pedestrian activity, and urban heat island effects.

Over the course of the three-year project, a fire hydrant water fountain with misting features prototype will be designed and evaluated. Following this, fire hydrant water fountain will be distributed to the identified communities in 2026.

This year, four sites were selected using the equity-based framework, and the fountains are currently undergoing routine testing to ensure functionality ahead of installation next

season. This initiative will provide immediate cooling access during extreme heat events for communities in the selected neighbourhoods.

Project 3: Cooling Options Analysis for Social Housing

This project will explore options for installing, operating, and maintaining permanent mechanical cooling in a sample of existing social housing building types. Barriers to installation will also be identified. The objective of this project is to provide social housing providers with a feasibility analysis of the cooling options for buildings, which can aid in asset management planning and potentially supporting future funding applications for permanent cooling options.

For this project, OPH is working collaboratively with the IWS, SI, and CSSD.

OPH and CSSD developed a survey to provide insight into whether social housing buildings are equipped with mechanical cooling and gauging interest in participating in a feasibility study to determine mechanical permanent building-wide cooling options. The almost thirty social housing providers completed the survey. Key findings include:

- Most reported no permanent cooling in their buildings;
- Many allow portable air conditioning units; and
- Cost and lack of funding were identified as major barriers to implementing permanent cooling.

From the survey participants who wanted to be involved in the social housing cooling options feasibility study, building types were selected that were representative of type, age, and could be replicated for use by others social housing providers. An equity lens was also added to ensure selection reflected diversity, accessibility, and inclusivity for equity-deserving communities. Following the selection of the buildings, an engineering consultant firm was hired to conduct energy modelling and provide feasibility assessments for mechanical cooling options for these social housing building types.

This work is a critical step in supporting social housing providers with the information needed to consider implementing cooling options and will help in future funding applications for permanent cooling that require feasibility studies.

CONCLUSION

The HealthADAPT initiatives are projects that support progress on both OPH's and the City of Ottawa's strategic goals in addressing climate change adaptation and will help make communities more resilient to climate change. These projects aim to make meaningful progress in addressing climate-related health risks and equity gaps in Ottawa. They will generate practical tools, evidence, and replicable models to support future climate adaptation efforts, particularly for the communities more susceptible to climate change. To facilitate these projects' sustainability and scalability, the Climate Ready Ottawa climate resiliency strategy includes ways to expand these projects.

Ottawa Public Health remains committed to building a more climate-resilient and equitable city.

CC:

Clara Freire, General Manager, Community & Social Services Department

Ryan Perrault, General Manager, Emergency & Protective Services

Tammy Rose, General Manager, Infrastructure & Water Services Department

Debbie Stewart, General Manager, Strategic Initiative Department

Nichole Hoover-Bienasz, Director, Strategic Initiatives Department

REFERENCES

ⁱ World Health Organization. (2025, October 29). Climate inaction is claiming millions of lives every year, warns new Lancet Countdown report. World Health Organization. Accessed Nov. 7, 2025. <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-10-2025-climate-inaction-is-claiming-millions-of-lives-every-year--warns-new-lancet-countdown-report>