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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner & Medical Officer of Health
Report: #2024-INFO-49
Date: August 16, 2024

Subject:

Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessments

Recommendation:

Receive for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 To provide an update on Durham Region Health Department's (DRHD's) Climate Change and Health Vulnerability Assessments (CCHVAs).

2. Background

2.1 DRHD is mandated to conduct health vulnerability assessments under the [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services and Accountability](#) (OPHS).

2.2 The [Healthy Environments and Climate Change Guideline](#) of the OPHS requires DRHD to assess health impacts related to climate change.

2.3 DRHD is completing the following seven reports in a special CCHVA series called Understanding the Local Health Impacts of Climate Change:

- a. A background primer on climate change and health in Durham Region, followed by six CCHVAs on:
 - Extreme heat
 - Solar UV radiation
 - Vector-borne disease
 - Food and water impacts
 - Extreme weather, and

- Air quality.

2.4 The report series aims to:

- Improve understanding of the links between climate change and health.
- Assess the risks of local climate hazards and associated health impacts.
- Prioritize health equity and priority populations.
- Establish a baseline for future analysis.

2.5 The first report, released on August 12, 2024, is the background primer and is entitled: [Understanding the Local Health Impacts of Climate Change](#). It includes the reviews and feedback provided by the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation and Regional Sustainability staff of the Office of the CAO.

2.6 The report, along with an executive summary are available at durham.ca/ClimateAndHealth.

3. Report Highlights

3.1 The first report serves as an essential background primer that explores current and future health impacts of climate hazards in Durham Region.

3.2 It establishes an equity-focused framework for assessing and addressing factors of climate vulnerability, based on exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity to climate hazards.

3.3 The background primer provides a global and local overview of climate change and related health impacts as well as local environmental and community features relevant to assessing climate-related health risks.

3.4 Key findings focus on the health impacts of six major climate hazards and those who may be worst affected:

- Climate change is causing more frequent and intense climate hazards, which increase the local risks of loss, injury, illness, poor mental health, and death.
- Although Durham Region is already experiencing the effects of climate change, most residents do not believe they will be harmed by it.
- Not everyone is affected equally, and climate vulnerability depends on an individual's or community's degree of exposure, sensitivity, and capacity to adapt to a climate hazard.
- People who generally face greater climate related health risks include adults over age 65, children and youth, Indigenous Peoples, racialized populations, people with disabilities, people who are pregnant, residents of more remote rural communities, individuals who are socially and economically disadvantaged, and people with pre-existing health challenges.
- Some local area residents experience multiple compounded risk factors (e.g., older age, food insecurity and isolation) which is why climate change can act

as a “threat multiplier”, worsening existing health inequities while creating the conditions for new ones to emerge.

- f. Durham Region’s rich and diverse ecosystems including forests, wetlands and grasslands are crucial for protecting against health impacts from extreme heat, flooding and other climate hazards.

4. Relationship to Strategic Plan

4.1 This report aligns with the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

a. Goal 1: Environmental Sustainability

- 1.4: Demonstrate leadership in sustainability and addressing climate change.

b. Goal 2: Community Vitality

- 2.2: Enhance community safety and well-being.
- 2.3 Influence the social determinants of health to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations.
- 2.5 Build a healthy, inclusive, age-friendly community where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

5. Next Steps

5.1 The background primer report will be disseminated and promoted to municipal and community partners. The communication plan includes a news release and social media messages to build public awareness of the six main climate hazards of concern for communities as well as the link between climate change and health.

5.2 The remaining reports of the CCHVA series will be completed, published and promoted in sequence.

5.3 The extreme heat report entitled, Climate Change and Health in Durham Region: Assessing the Impact of Extreme Heat, is expected to be published in the fall of 2024.

5.4 The report development process will continue to integrate the review and feedback of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation and Regional Sustainability staff.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The CCHVA report series is intended to help decision-makers better understand the health risks that Durham Region residents will face in the coming years.

6.2 It will help guide equity-focused adaptation plans to protect residents, especially those who are most affected and least protected.

6.3 The CCHVA report series will be used to support health systems, municipalities, community organizations and residents to plan and respond to the growing impacts of climate change.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

R.J. Kyle, BSc, MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC, FACPM
Commissioner & Medical Officer of Health