



To: Mayor John Tory & Toronto City Councilors
From: Kim Perrotta MHSc, Executive Director
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Date: July 14, 2021
Re: Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

I am writing to ask you to endorse the [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) so we can leave our children and grandchildren a stable and livable planet. I am doing so as a public health professional who has worked on environmental issues for over 30 years and as the Executive Director for CHASE, a non-profit organization directed and run by public health professionals.

Several weeks ago, when a draft of the next report by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) was leaked to the press, we learned that climate scientists believe we are **currently flirting with tipping points that could lead to a series of cascading events with catastrophic and irreversible** implications for the world. We are talking about impacts that could make the world uninhabitable for people in the near future.

The conclusions in the draft IPCC report were echoed in a new report released by the scientifically conservative, [International Energy Agency \(IEA\)](#). It noted that: “Even if every country meets its current climate targets, Earth’s temperature will still rise by a dangerous 2.1°C this century”. It described the **path to net zero by 2050 as “narrow and extremely challenging” and concluded that electricity grids in developed economies must be zero emissions by 2053 and that no new fossil fuel projects should be approved.**

In December 2020, the prestigious medical journal, **The Lancet**, released the fifth [Lancet Countdown Report on Health and Climate Change](#), which identified the many ways in which climate change is already harming the health of people around the world. It reported, for example, that globally:

- 296,000 people died prematurely in 2018 because of extreme heat;
- 302 billion work hours were lost in 2019 due to extreme heat;
- the land surface area affected by excess drought in 2018 was more than twice the historical baseline;
- the yield potential for major crops declined by 1.8 to 5.6% between 1981 and 2019 due to rising temperatures and extreme climate-related events; and
- Without intervention, between 145 and 565 million people living in coastal areas today will be affected by rising sea levels in the coming decades.

The [Climate Change Toolkit for Health Professionals](#), that I produced for the Canadian Association for Physicians for the Environment (**CAPE**) in May 2019, discusses the ways in which climate change is already threatening the physical and mental health of people across Canada - with rising temperatures, melting permafrost, and extreme climate-related events such as heat waves, droughts, floods, wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, ice storms, and power outages - that have been increasing in frequency and intensity over the last several decades.

Wildfires alone have already had a profound impact upon the health of Canadians. **Canadian environmental health researchers have estimated that exposure to wildfire smoke in Canada between 2013 and 2018 (excluding 2016, the year of the Fort McMurray wildfire) has produced health-related impacts valued at \$4.7 to \$20.8 billion per year.**

In June 2021, the [Canadian Institute for Climate Choices \(CICC\)](#) estimated that only two of the many climate-related impacts that can be expected in the coming years - increasing levels of ground-level ozone and increasing temperatures – **could result in nearly \$100 billion per year in health-related impacts in Canada within 30 years under a low emissions scenario.** This report reaffirmed what researchers and public health professionals have been saying for years; climate change is and will hit the disadvantaged people in our communities the hardest.

Like COVID-19, climate change will [amplify the health inequities](#) that already exist in our society. It will have a greater impact on:

- those who are most sensitive to stressors such as heat and air pollution including older people, young children and people with pre-existing health conditions such as asthma;
- low-income populations, many of which are racialized, that are most likely to work outdoors or in places without air conditioning; that are the least likely to have air conditioning at home or access to greenspace, parks or pools; that are least likely to have the resources to recover from floods and other extreme weather events; and
- Indigenous populations that rely upon the land for a significant portion of their food.

Many health professionals share the deep concerns that I am expressing in this letter. In December 2019, for example, 24 health organizations across Canada signed on to a [Call for Action on Climate Change and Health](#) that I prepared for CAPE, including the Canadian Medical Association (**CMA**), the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Canadian Nurses Association (**CNA**), the Canadian Public Health Association (**CPHA**), and the Urban Public Health Network (**UPHN**). A number of the recommendations in that declaration implied the phasing out of fossil fuels in different sectors of the economy including one directed at the oil and gas sector, which called for the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies, the tight regulation of methane emissions, and the phase-out of oil and gas extraction over time.

We have run out of time. For 30 years, we have been warned about the impacts that greenhouse gas emissions could have on the climate, the economy and human health. In fact, I prepared a brief summary of the adverse health risks posed by climate change in a report for Toronto's Board of Health in Dr. David McKeown's name in June 1997. It is well past the time for decision-makers to listen to the scientists; to heed the advice of public health professionals and health care workers; to make the tough decisions that are needed to save humankind.

There is good news in this story. Many of the actions needed to fight climate change will improve global health. Investments in [public transit](#), [active modes of transportation](#), [building retrofits](#), [zero emission vehicles](#) and [renewable energy](#) will improve air quality, increase physical activity, and with intention, reduce health inequities. We are talking about significant and immediate health benefits. For example, a new peer reviewed study has estimated that we could avoid up to [36,000 premature deaths per year](#) in Canada if we stopped burning fossil fuels.