

**Canadian Public Health Association**

**National Public Education and Outreach Strategy on  
Climate Change**

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## I PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Public education and outreach will be critical to addressing climate change effectively. Individual Canadians and their communities have a significant role to play in both reducing their emissions of key pollutants and protecting themselves from the health impacts of climate change. However, greater understanding of climate change, its effects, and its relationship to other public health threats such as air pollution will be needed before Canadians will be prepared to take these critical actions.

### Key objectives of this strategy are:

- To educate the health sector about the potential health impacts of climate change;
- To engage the health sector in public outreach initiatives on climate change aimed at the general public, with particular emphasis on vulnerable populations;
- To encourage the integration of health messages into other climate change and clean air related public education and outreach campaigns; and
- To encourage community-level action in adapting to the health-related impacts of climate change.

As such, the purpose of this strategy is to build awareness and understanding among Canadians regarding the health effects of climate change, in order, ultimately, *to engage Canadians and their communities in taking action to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.*

### Key outcomes from this strategy will include:

- Clear, consistent core messages about the potential health effects of climate change, and possible actions to reduce greenhouse gases and adapt to the effects of climate change;
- An active and engaged core of professionals in the health sector able to deliver public education and outreach initiatives to vulnerable populations and the general public;
- Mechanisms for ongoing collaboration among health organizations, with linkages to other key sectors active in public education and outreach;
- Enhanced engagement at the community level in mitigative and adaptive actions.

## II BACKGROUND

The Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) has a long history of involvement in environmental health issues. In 1988, environmental health was identified as the top public health concern among CPHA members. In 1991, a CPHA Task Force report on Human and Ecosystem Health was released, which addressed the implications of global ecological changes for human health. Human and ecosystem health was subsequently designated as one of CPHA's six strategic areas of interest in 1995.

Climate change became an increasing focus of CPHA's environmental health-related work in the late 1990s. In 1999, CPHA<sup>1</sup> commissioned a survey of public awareness initiatives on the health effects of climate change and air pollution in four sectors (health, education, environmental advocacy, and the private sector). Based on the results of this survey, an Options Paper was developed exploring possible roles for CPHA in this area.<sup>2</sup>

CPHA also sponsored a Roundtable on Health and Climate Change in September 2000. The purpose of this Roundtable was to:

- review the scientific consensus on the health impacts of climate change;
- discuss the co-benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- identify how the health sector can prepare for the impacts of climate change; and
- clarify the contribution and role of the health sector in promoting the general public's understanding of the causes and solutions to climate change.

Over forty organizations participated in the Roundtable. The findings from their discussions form the basis of a strategic plan on health and climate change, finalized by CPHA in February 2001<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> in partnership with the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Nurses Association, the Canadian School Boards Association, Friends of the Earth and TransAlta Corporation

<sup>2</sup> Supporting Public Awareness Initiatives on the Health Effects of Climate Change and Air Pollution Options Paper, Prepared for the Canadian Public Health Association, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Strategic Plan on Health and Climate Change: A Framework for Collaborative Action, prepared for the Canadian Public Health Association, February 2001.

### III CONTEXT

Public education and outreach is critical to effectively addressing climate change. Public support for public policy changes will provide an important impetus for governments to act over time. In addition, a significant percentage of greenhouse gas emissions is influenced by individual and community decisions, making citizens important partners in adopting solutions to climate change.

However, there is an overall lack of public understanding about the causes of and solutions to the climate change challenge. Public opinion research commissioned by the national Public Education and Outreach Table on climate change suggests that there is tremendous uncertainty across the country about the subject of climate change. Furthermore, there is significant confusion regarding the differences between the causes and impacts of climate change, clean air, and stratospheric ozone layer depletion.

According to this research, most people feel uninformed or under-informed about climate change, and believe they have heard mixed messages about climate change from numerous sources. In addition, there is a discernible credibility gap on the issue, with many Canadians feeling they do not know where to turn for reliable information.

The health sector may have an important role to play in closing this credibility gap. In addition, there are clear opportunities to use health impacts as a lens for enhancing public understanding of the climate change issue. There may also be opportunities to combine education initiatives on climate change with similar initiatives on clean air, which the public understands and supports more readily at the current time.

This PEO strategy is designed to be consistent with and supportive of other climate change PEO initiatives, while remaining carefully focused in its approach.

#### **Key contextual factors include:**

- the national PEO strategy on climate change approved by Joint Ministers of Energy and the Environment;
- clean air initiatives;
- the findings of the 1999 CPHA Survey on Supporting Public Awareness Initiatives on the Health Effects of Climate Change; and
- the strategic plan on climate change for the health sector, prepared by CPHA in February 2001.

## ***National PEO Strategy on Climate Change***

The First National Business Plan on Climate Change, approved by federal, provincial, and territorial Ministers of Energy and the Environment in October 2000, included a national PEO strategy on climate change. This strategy, entitled “Reaching Out to Canadians on Climate Change: A Public Education and Outreach Strategy”, establishes three key objectives for public education and outreach:

1. To **build awareness and understanding** among Canadians of climate change, including the science, impacts and adaptation, and the associated environmental, economic and social issues;
2. To **develop support** from Canadians for policy changes and actions that will be required as part of the National Implementation Strategy; and
3. To **encourage and motivate Canadians to take personal and corporate action** to reduce GHG emissions.

The proposed CPHA PEO strategy is consistent with these national objectives. The national PEO strategy recognizes the importance of education related to health impacts of climate change. It also recommends that a ‘brand’ identity focusing on climate change be used in conjunction with other approaches, including those that “link the concern for clean air with climate change, an issue already of concern to Canadians and that clearly links to health issues.”<sup>4</sup>

### ***Clean Air Initiatives***

Clean air has become a growing public health concern in recent years. New scientific information about ground-level ozone and fine particulate matter suggests that even low levels of exposure to these pollutants can be harmful to human health, particularly among vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly.

Governments across Canada have begun to take action in response to these threats. The federal government declared particulate matter to be toxic under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act in May 2000, triggering a requirement for action within 24 months. In addition, Canada and the United States finalized negotiations on an Air Quality Ozone Annex in October 2000. Along with efforts by both provincial and federal governments to implement Canada-wide Standards for particulate matter and ozone, these commitments provide a strong framework for action on clean air over the next ten years.

Individual and community engagement is expected to play a critical role in efforts to achieve these goals. Public education and outreach initiatives are likely to build on the success of existing federal programs, such as EcoAction 2000 and the Community Animation Program.

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<sup>4</sup> Public Education and Outreach Table. November 15, 1999: page 7.

## ***CPHA Survey on Supporting Public Awareness Initiatives on the Health Effects of Climate Change***

In the fall of 1999, CPHA surveyed 188 Canadian organizations from four sectors (education, environment, health, and private sector) on public awareness initiatives related to the health effects of climate change and air pollution<sup>5</sup>. Key findings of the survey included the fact that few Public Awareness Initiatives (PAIs) 'directly link the health effects of climate change and air pollution, although many organizations indicated a willingness and opportunities to do so'. The survey results also noted that there is a need for resource materials on the health effects of climate change and air pollution designed to educate health providers and other audiences.

The draft CPHA PEO strategy builds on the findings of this survey to define an appropriate role and mandate for CPHA in contributing to increased public awareness and understanding of the health impacts of climate change, while recognizing the importance of linkages to clean air.

### ***Strategic Plan on Climate Change for the Health Sector***

At the Roundtable on Health and Climate Change, held in Ottawa from September 17-19, 2000, there was widespread agreement among participants on the need for strong public outreach and engagement on climate change. Public outreach and engagement was identified as one of five core elements of the strategic plan that was subsequently developed to provide a collaborative framework for action within the health sector.

Several relevant challenges identified in the strategic plan include the lack of information on the specific health impacts of climate change for Canada, as well as the high degree of regional variability in these effects.

The plan identifies several areas that education and outreach initiatives could target, including: outreach to the health sector; education to the general public; and outreach to other sectors. Participants emphasized the important and influential role that professionals in the health sector can play as credible spokespeople on issues that can affect the health of their clients.

This PEO strategy builds on the findings of the Roundtable to elaborate CPHA's role in raising public awareness and understanding of the health impacts of climate change

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<sup>5</sup> Canadian Public Health Association. Supporting Public Awareness Initiatives on the Health Effects of Climate Change and Air Pollution: Survey Report. Ottawa: 1999. The survey design targeted PEO initiatives related to both climate change and air pollution in recognition of the health impacts and synergistic relationship between the two types of emissions.

## IV DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

This PEO strategy reflects a number of design considerations drawn from a review of other public education and outreach initiatives. These include both models studied by the Public Education and Outreach Table on Climate Change, as well as other programs established and run by CPHA.

### ***Public Education and Outreach Issue Table***

The Public Education and Outreach Table on Climate Change commissioned a number of research studies to inform their work. Lessons learned from other effective public education and outreach campaigns (e.g. drunk driving, anti-smoking, seat belts, etc.) include:

- ✓ Successful public outreach initiatives provide simple, consistent messages over the long-term;
  - ✓ Public education and public policy must be consistent and support each other. Outreach will not have a significant impact without a supportive policy context;
  - ✓ Successful campaigns make their key messages personal, real and vivid, and emphasize the relevance of their issues to the lives of individual people ('why should I care?');
  - ✓ Demonstrating solutions in action and sharing success at the local level is powerful;
  - ✓ Successful public outreach initiatives target specific audiences, set clear goals, clarify expected results, pilot test the approach, and monitor and evaluate results;
  - ✓ Successful initiatives need to understand and respond to barriers to success; and
- ✓ Coordination of widespread activities, messages and measurements of success is important. Partnered delivery is often a key component.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Existing CPHA Models***

Lessons can be learned from CPHA's experience managing other national programs, such as the Literacy and Health Program and the Canadian Immunization Awareness Program. A review of these programs confirms the importance of such factors as:

- ✓ developing consistent messages and plain language materials, disseminated through partner organizations;
- ✓ tailoring messages and educational material to (a) specific, well-defined audience(s);
- ✓ engaging other partners within the health sector in both the development of the overall strategy and specific programs;
- ✓ fostering partnerships with governments at all levels; and
- ✓ establishing centralized secretariat services to provide coordination at the national level.

While these programs are structured quite differently, they both rely heavily on partnerships and collaboration with other health organizations.

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<sup>6</sup> Lessons learned are drawn from 'Reaching out to Canadians on Climate Change: A Public Education and Outreach Strategy', submitted by the Public Education and Outreach Issue Table as part of the National Climate Change Implementation Process, November 15, 1999.

## V PRINCIPLES

The draft PEO strategy is built on a core set of principles. These include:

*Emphasizing the centrality of health issues to the climate change debate;*

*Learning from and building on existing public education and outreach initiatives;*

*Multiplying the impacts of existing initiatives and organizations;*

*Fostering enhanced coordination and collaboration within the health sector and with other key constituencies;*

*Enhancing consistency in messages, including the integration of clean air and climate change messaging to the extent possible;*

*Reflecting regional variability within a national framework for action; and*

*Adopting a flexible and phased approach, to enable the strategy to evolve over time.*

## VI STRATEGIC APPROACH

The purpose of this strategy is to build awareness and understanding among Canadians regarding the health effects of climate change in order, ultimately, *to engage Canadians and their communities in taking action to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.*

Key objectives of the strategy are:

- To educate the health sector about the potential health impacts of climate change;
- To engage the health sector in public outreach initiatives on climate change aimed at the general public, with particular emphasis on vulnerable populations;
- To encourage the integration of health messages into other climate change and clean air related public education and outreach campaigns; and
- To encourage community-level action in adapting to the health-related impacts of climate change.

CPHA's overall strategic approach to public education and outreach on climate change is to *magnify and enhance the ability of the health sector and other organizations to deliver effective programs on climate change and human health.* This approach will enable CPHA to provide an overall framework for national action, while recognizing the importance of tailoring initiatives to both target audiences (including different groups of professionals within the health sector) and the needs and concerns of different regions.

### **Roles**

The PEO strategy will position CPHA to provide leadership at the national level on raising awareness of the health impacts of climate change. CPHA will also act as a catalyst for action among health non-governmental organizations across the country.

### **Key areas of focus**

Two main areas of focus are contained within this approach:

1. building public awareness of the impacts of climate change on human health;
2. building community-level capacity to adapt to the health impacts of climate change.

There are six roles CPHA can play in achieving its objectives:

- developing core messages related to the health impacts of climate change;
- interfacing with other sectors and organizations to integrate consistent health messages into their education and awareness programs;
- designing educational materials;
- coordinating information delivery (within the health sector and beyond);
- facilitating enhanced cooperation and collaboration among partner organizations; and
- delivering community-level adaptation projects in conjunction with key partners

The first area of focus relates to the *impacts of climate change on human health*, with a view to raising awareness, building support for longer-term policy changes, and ultimately, encouraging community action to mitigate the effects of climate change. Target audiences are professionals in the health sector in the first phase (to build their capacity to deliver key messages and targeted information), who in turn will deliver information to members of the general public (with a particular focus on vulnerable populations, such as asthma sufferers).

Key messages and educational materials in this area could address both the *impacts of climate change on human health*, and the *contribution climate solutions can make to improving human health* now and in the future. Clearly establishing the links

between climate change and clean air will be important to message development.

The second area of focus relates to building community-level capacity to adapt to the health-related impacts of climate change. The target audience in this instance is institutions most likely to have to respond to these health-related challenges, such as municipal governments, public health authorities, water authorities, etc. These audiences will require information materials on both the impacts of climate change, and possible adaptation response measures.

### ***Delivery***

Consistent with the principles of building on and multiplying the effectiveness of existing initiatives and organizations, CPHA's strategy will emphasize *indirect delivery* of educational and communications programs. In other words, most PEO-related activities will be delivered by organizations other than CPHA, both within the health sector and beyond.

However, within the second area of focus – building community-level adaptation capacity – CPHA will adopt a more direct delivery role through its national office and provincial/territorial branch offices, in conjunction with key partners.

Positioning CPHA and the health sector more generally to launch an effective national public education and outreach initiative requires a solid information base on climate change and human health. A key challenge for CPHA is the lack of strong scientific evidence on the health impacts of climate change *specific to Canada*. CPHA will work with other members of the health sector and the scientific community to strengthen the knowledge base in this area.

Also critical to the success of the strategy will be the effective engagement of professionals in the health sector as credible, knowledgeable spokespeople. As such, during strategy implementation CPHA will recognize and draw upon the relative strengths, potential roles, and informational needs of various professional groups (e.g. doctors, nurses, public health officials).

Effective partnerships with governments at all levels (federal, provincial/ territorial and local/municipal), as well as with other non-governmental organizations, will be critical to the successful delivery of the strategy. CPHA's provincial and territorial affiliates will have a valuable role to play in conducting outreach with these organizations and institutions.

## ***Phased Approach***

A *phased approach* will enable the strategy to evolve over time and benefit from lessons learned in the early stages of the strategy.

### ***Phase I (2001-2003) will focus on:***

- ✓ *Consolidating the campaign's information base* through the establishment of a clearinghouse on climate change and human health;
- ✓ *Developing and testing core messages* about the potential health effects of climate change, possible actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and behavioural changes needed to adapt to the effects of climate change;
- ✓ *Developing and pilot testing targeted educational materials* designed to engage the health sector, the general public, and institutions vulnerable to the effects of climate change;
- ✓ *Conducting outreach to other sectors* active in public education on climate change to enhance consistency in messaging and to encourage them to incorporate health messages into their work; and
- ✓ *Evaluating Phase I activities* and refining the Phase II approach.

***Phase II (2004-2006) would focus on maintaining key Phase I initiatives and expanding the program by:***

- ✓ *tailoring messages and educational materials* for use by professionals in the health sector in communicating with their clients and the general public;
- ✓ *tailoring and delivering* programs aimed at increasing the adaptive capacity of key institutions (e.g. municipalities, public health authorities);
- ✓ *encouraging expanded delivery* of key messages and educational programs (i.e. graduating from a pilot program to full delivery);
- ✓ *pilot testing educational materials with new target groups*;
- ✓ *maintaining and expanding the information clearinghouse*; and
- ✓ *coordinating ongoing efforts* within the health sector and with other partners.

***Outcomes***

Key outcomes from this strategy will include:

- ✓ An active and engaged core of professionals in the health sector able to deliver public education and outreach initiatives to vulnerable populations and the general public;
- ✓ Clear, consistent messages and information about the potential health effects of climate change, possible actions to reduce greenhouse gases and adapt to the effects of climate change;
- ✓ Mechanisms for ongoing collaboration among health organizations, with linkages to other key sectors active in public education and outreach; and
- ✓ *Enhanced* engagement at the community level in mitigative and adaptive actions.

## VII IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of this PEO strategy will evolve over time, based on lessons learned in each successive phase.

Clearly, the success of CPHA's PEO strategy will depend on strong partnerships with professional health, non-governmental and private organizations. In the early stages of strategy implementation, CPHA will hold discussions with a range of potential collaborators to begin building the basis for long-term partnerships and alliances.

### ***Approach to Program Delivery***

CPHA's approach to delivery of this strategy has two prongs:

#### ***indirect delivery***

(i.e. delivery through partner organizations) of educational initiatives on the health impacts of climate change to both the health sector and the general public; and

#### ***direct delivery***

(i.e. delivery through CPHA) of adaptation-related initiatives with municipalities and other local institutions.

CPHA's provincial and territories branch offices will play an important role in the delivery of this strategy. These offices can participate in delivering programs on the ground, tailored to regional and local conditions, and could also provide links to the regional hubs where appropriate.

The strategy also anticipates the establishment of a Secretariat for the health sector at CPHA. This secretariat could both facilitate and coordinate key activities undertaken as part of the strategy, and could also provide linkages to the national PEO strategy approved by the Ministers of Energy and Environment (e.g. the regional and national hubs).

## VIII MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This strategy is a living document, and it will evolve over time in response to changing internal and external circumstances. Regular monitoring of progress, and of factors that could affect implementation or the direction of the program, will be important for its success. Continuous learning, through testing and piloting of various approaches prior to full-scale implementation of particular activities, is also an important aspect of this process.

CPHA staff will be responsible for monitoring implementation of this strategy. Quarterly reviews will be conducted to monitor progress and determine the need for modifications to the strategy. These reviews will document activities that have been initiated and implemented within the last quarter, and will identify changing

circumstances or new developments within the health and climate change program - or external to the program - that may influence the direction, emphasis or implementation of the strategy. The results of these reviews will be communicated to CPHA senior management.

In 2003, prior to the completion of Phase I, CPHA will complete a broad evaluation of this strategy. The purpose will be to evaluate the extent to which strategy implementation has met the stated objectives and contributed to the desired outcomes of the PEO program. The findings of the evaluation will be used to inform and refine Phase II of the strategy.