



Health Professionals to Federal Political Parties: Action Needed to Prevent Catastrophic Climate Change

February 5, 2019 – Ottawa (ON) – Today, Canada’s top health care providers and public health officials are in Ottawa to send a clear message to all political parties: Canadians are already feeling the adverse health effects of climate change and time is running out to prevent catastrophic climate change.

Together, representatives from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) and the Urban Public Health Network (UPHN) are calling for action: asking federal parties to recognize that climate change is the greatest public health challenge of the 21st century, and to make climate solutions a priority in the 2019 federal election.

The group is tabling an action plan calling for all federal parties to commit to:

- 1) Developing effective and evidence-based climate action plans that demonstrate how Canada will achieve the emission reductions needed to keep global warming below 1.5°C while prioritizing health.
- 2) Creating and funding the policies and programs needed to transition farmers, fossil fuel workers and their communities to a low carbon economy.
- 3) Providing the funding and coordination needed to ensure that our health care institutions, public health units, and communities are resilient; prepared for the climate change that is happening; and able to minimize the impact of climate change on Canadians’ physical and mental health.

The immediate health effects of climate change became a greater reality for many Canadians in the summer of 2018 as the country experienced soaring temperatures, massive wildfires, and dangerous levels of air pollution as smoke blanketed their communities.

In the fall of 2018, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report that articulated the devastating health impacts that would result from 2°C of global warming; impacts that would put hundreds of millions of people at risk from climate-related poverty.

To prevent global warming from reaching 2°C, the IPCC concluded that the global community must cut climate emission by 45% by 2030 and to zero by 2050. Canada’s current targets do not represent our fair share of that reduction, and current projections show that we are not on track to meet the current targets.

Adequate treatment of our climate emergency is possible if we work together. Many of the actions needed to fight climate change will produce significant and immediate health benefits and healthcare savings across Canada. Phasing out coal-fired power, transitioning towards plant-rich diets, and shifting personal transport towards more active options will make our air cleaner, our kids healthier, our rates of chronic disease lower, and our communities more vibrant.

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We are the generation in charge during the last time window for humanity to decrease its emissions enough to maintain a livable climate. The next 12 years are critical: Members of Parliament elected in the 2019 federal election will ultimately have the opportunity to ensure a healthy response to climate change or be responsible for devastating climate-related impacts that will be visited on our children and future generations. Just as when we do CPR during a code blue in the hospital, we need to push hard, push fast, and not stop in order to ensure a healthy outcome.

Dr. Courtney Howard, President of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE)

Climate change is no longer some abstract idea that may harm future generations or people on the other side of the globe; it’s a reality that’s already harming the physical and mental health of Canadians. We cannot afford to treat climate change as a wedge issue. We must treat it as the public health crisis that it is.

Dr. Gigi Osler, President of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA)

For over thirty years, the Canadian Public Health Association has recognized the inextricable link between human health and the environment and warned that human health outcomes are inseparable from environmental conditions and policies. The threats to physical and mental health from climate change have the potential to undermine the advances we’ve made in the past century and create an unsustainable burden on Canada’s publicly funded health systems and economy. As a nation, we can avoid this disaster by tackling climate change today and improve public health for generations to come.

Ian Culbert, Executive Director, Canadian Public Health Association

Climate change has created great health risks for Canadians. The federal government, opposition parties and organizations alike need to come together to support adaptation and mitigation with respect to climate change. CNA believes that nurses play an integral role in supporting Canadians to live healthier and more environmentally friendly lives.

Dr. Claire Betker, President, Canadian Nurses Association (CNA)

From a public health point of view, there is no more immediate challenge than climate change. If we are going to build resilience and resourcefulness among our cities, municipal and government partners, we need to exert meaningful effort in setting processes in motion now to respond to global warming.

Dr. Alex Summers, Urban Public Health Network

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About the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the health of people by protecting the planet. Founded in 1993, CAPE is an evidence-based ethics-driven organization, supported by volunteer members, and directed by a board composed primarily of physicians.

About the Canadian Medical Association

The Canadian Medical Association unites Canada's physicians and physicians-in-training on national health and medical matters. Formed in Quebec City in 1867, the CMA's rich history of advocacy led to some of Canada's most important health policy changes. As we look to the future, the CMA will focus on advocating for a healthy population and a vibrant profession.

About the Canadian Nurses Association

The Canadian Nurses Association is the national and global professional voice of Canadian nursing, representing over 139,000 registered nurses and nurse practitioners in Canada. CNA advances the practice and profession of nursing to improve health outcomes and strengthen Canada's publicly funded, not-for-profit health system.

About the Canadian Public Health Association

Founded in 1910, the Canadian Public Health Association is the independent voice for public health in Canada with links to the international community. As the only Canadian non-governmental organization focused exclusively on public health, we are uniquely positioned to advise decision-makers about public health system reform and to guide initiatives to help safeguard the personal and community health of Canadians and people around the world. We are a national, independent, not-for-profit, voluntary association. Our members believe in universal and equitable access to the basic conditions which are necessary to achieve health for all.

About the Urban Public Health Network

The Urban Public Health Network (UPHN) is a network of Medical Officers of Health in urban centres in Canada who came together in 2004 to address public health issues that are common to urban populations. The network encompasses approximately 50% of the Canadian population. The UPHN works with other organizations who have an interest in improving the health of the population.

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For more information or to request an interview, please contact:

Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE)

Kaeleigh Phillips
1-416-306-2273 ext. 1
Kaeleigh@cape.ca

Canadian Medical Association (CMA)

Ziad Saab
613-806-1865
mediainquiries@cma.ca

Canadian Public Health Association

Emma Mallach
613-725-3769, ext. 160
communications@cpha.ca

Canadian Nurses Association (CNA)

Eve Johnston
613-237-2159 Ext. 114 Cell: 613-282-7859
ejohnston@cna-aiic.ca