

## **Statement in support of Climate Emergency declaration**

Caroline Kuate, Environment Committee for Climate Change, EOHU representative

### **Our environment is a key determinant of our health!**

Climate change has serious implications for the health and wellbeing of humans in a variety of important ways, both directly and indirectly. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared climate change as the number one threat to global health of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With the changing climate we will see an increase in extreme weather and natural events, extreme temperatures, vector-borne diseases, and exposure to solar ultraviolet radiation. Our food and water supply, and air quality will be affected. For instance:

**Floods:** The effect of flooding extends beyond immediate deaths and injuries. It also causes a non-specific increase in mortality, an increased rate of infectious diseases, exposure to toxic substances, mental health effects etc.

**Drought:** Climate change is likely to increase drought globally and regionally, including within Canada, by the end of the century. In recent years, drought has affected communities across Canada and has had significant impacts on individuals. Droughts affect our drinking water supply by causing high concentration of nutrient and chemical contaminants, creating favorable conditions for the formation of toxic algal blooms.

**Heat waves:** An increase in the frequency or intensity of heatwaves will increase the risk of mortality and morbidity, principally in older age groups and among the urban poor. Direct impacts to health include heat cramps – muscular pains and spasms, heat exhaustion – body fluids lost through heavy sweating, and heat stroke – a life-threatening condition that occurs when the body's temperature reaches 40°C.

Considering these threats, and mandated by the MOHLTC, the EOHU initiated a climate change health vulnerability and adaptation assessment of our community. The project was aimed at educating and raising awareness on public health impacts of a changing climate, assessing the health vulnerability, and evaluating the capacity of the community to prevent, adapt and respond to the health effects of climate change. Though the project was halted due to the global pandemic of COVID-19, the declaration of a climate emergency for the City of Cornwall will further support this initiative.

By declaring a climate emergency, we are committing to adopt policies and practices that will build capacity to prevent and adapt to impacts of climate change. Mitigation efforts that aim to slow, stabilize, or reverse climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions also help prevent health effects. Many of the actions that can be taken by individuals and communities to help limit climate change and adapt to its impact, also improve human health including ways completely unrelated to climate change.

**Public Health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure conditions for people to be healthy - Institute of Medicine**