

Heat Relief Services

Date: November 8, 2018
To: Board of Health
From: Medical Officer of Health
Wards: All

SUMMARY

In March 2018, the Board of Health directed the Medical Officer of Health to review the Heat Relief Network that would increase access to cool spaces and to complete the review of the Cooling Centres as previously directed by Council. This report makes recommendations on how City Divisions can work collaboratively to create a coordinated heat relief response.

Published evidence shows that access to cooling is a key intervention to reduce the impacts of hot weather on health. In Toronto, there are many locations that provide a space for people to seek relief from the heat including over 250 City facilities such as community centres and libraries, pools, and a network of shelters and drop-in services. This past summer, many of these facilities were actively promoted as part of the Heat Relief Network.

To put the City in a stronger position to protect residents from extreme heat, the City needs a coordinated proactive response from a city-wide, strategic and operational perspective. The forthcoming Resilience Strategy will offer an opportunity for the impact of hot weather to be considered systematically along with other extreme weather events.

A continued focus on enhancing communication and increasing access to the many cool spaces that already exist across the city is needed to further build community resilience to extreme heat. This approach is in keeping with those in other major North American cities that maximize access to cooling by promoting a broad range of publicly accessible air conditioned spaces and placing emphasis on effectively communicating their availability. To accomplish this, a work group is recommended to coordinate the strategies that have been shown to be effective such as a media campaign that promotes "neighbour checking"; web-based information; a process for adding organizations to the Network; and supporting City Divisions to implement heat relief initiatives as part of their mandates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. City Council request the Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, to work with the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services, as well as other relevant City Divisions and Toronto Public Health to promote heat relief strategies, using the initiatives identified in this report, as part of their Divisional mandates.
2. City Council request the Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, in collaboration with Toronto Public Health to lead an interim work group to coordinate the implementation of heat relief strategies for 2019.
3. The Board of Health forward this report to the City of Toronto's Resilience Office as input to the upcoming Resiliency Strategy for the City.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts arising from this report beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

DECISION HISTORY

On March 5, 2018, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health report back on the Heat Relief Network, including the review of the Cooling Centres and assess how best people who are experiencing homelessness or are under-housed can access cool space.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.HL25.3>

On May 17, 2017, the Board of Health adopted a staff report and requested a number of actions to reduce the vulnerability of residents to extreme heat in the community and at home, including examining multiple strategies to increase access to cooling.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.HL19.5>

On February 15, 2017, City Council approved funding to operate seven City-run Cooling Centres during the 2017 warm season and to review the program.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.EX22.2>

On September 30, 2016 the Board of Health requested a review of the Toronto Hot Weather Response Plan and a report back in fall 2017.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.HL14.5>

On June 29, 2015, the Board of Health adopted the Climate Change and Health Strategy for Toronto which includes exploring options to protect vulnerable populations from extreme heat and improvements to Toronto's Hot Weather Response Plan. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.HL5.4>

COMMENTS

This report presents an overview of the Heat Relief Network (the Network) and other heat relief services at the City such as Cooling Centres. The report has been prepared in consultation with the Chief Resilience Officer, Environment and Energy Division, Facilities Management, the Chief Transformation Officer, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Social Development, Finance and Administration, Office of Emergency Management, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Toronto Public Library.

With climate change already upon us, Toronto can expect to experience more days of extreme heat. In 2018, the City had 18 days with maximum temperatures above 30°C. It is projected that there will be 66 such days by 2040-2050¹. It is clear that the challenges posed by extreme heat will only increase. As such, it is important to continue to identify opportunities to strategically respond to the impacts of extreme heat across City Divisions.

As directed by the Board of Health (BOH), TPH, with relevant City Divisions, undertook a number of actions to enhance the City's heat relief services in 2018, including enhanced promotion of the Network, website upgrades, and the development and distribution of heat educational resources.

Heat Relief Network

A Heat Relief Network that maximizes the number of facilities available for cooling can reduce barriers that may prevent people from using the Centres such as limited transportation, by ensuring multiple facilities are located throughout the entire City. The Network was in effect from May 15th to September 30th 2018. During this time, community centres and libraries across the City were more actively promoted as places for people to visit to cool down. In addition to City-owned facilities and Toronto Public Library branches, external partners reached out to express their interest in joining the Network.

Toronto Public Health implemented several communication strategies about the Network and hot weather and health during the 2018 heat season in collaboration with other City Divisions. Updates were made to the extreme heat webpage to include an interactive and searchable map so that Network facilities were more easily identified. Approximately 43,000 heat education resources were distributed to City and community partners. A training module about heat-related illness was developed and shared with staff at Network sites.

From a health perspective, availability of access to a cool space is key to reducing potential health impacts from hot weather. Focusing efforts on ensuring access to cool spaces are dispersed throughout the City in a diversity of locations through expansion of the Network will increase proximity of access to all Toronto residents. For example, incorporating relief to extreme heat into services that are already in place to support vulnerable populations, such as City-run drop-in services, would facilitate this expansion to those most at-risk to the health impacts.

Expansion of the Network to include both City-owned as well as non-City operated facilities to maximize access to cooling should be explored. A process to add new organizations to the Network is needed to increase the number of participating facilities. This includes creating an approach to identify suitable organizations, establishing criteria to be included as a Network facility (i.e. having air-conditioning, seating space, an accessible entrance), and developing materials to promote facilities as cool spaces so the public are aware and encouraged to visit these sites. For example, promotional material such as a poster with a common brand identifying a facility as a Network site could be posted on the door/windows of organizations to make them more easily recognized as a cool space by the public.

Moving forward, introducing additional communication strategies that promote the Network locations and the services they provide can encourage people to visit these places during hot weather. This includes enhancements to the website, the development of a brand for Network facilities, and communication strategies that include measures people can take to protect themselves and others in hot weather to better protect health.

Cooling Centres

In 2018, the Cooling Centres were open for 16 days as a result of Heat Warnings being called. While the seven Centres provide a space to cool off, their use is variable and they are not all easily accessed in terms of their physical location as compared to over 250 City facilities (pools, community centres, libraries, shelters, etc.) that provide access to cool space all summer.

Based on this experience, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) recommends that TPH work with the Deputy City Manager Corporate Services, Deputy City Manager Community and Social Services as well as other relevant City Divisions to determine how best to support the general public and vulnerable populations during hot weather.

Collaboration with City Partners

Ongoing collaboration with City partners who support vulnerable groups is key to mitigating the impacts of hot weather on health. This includes people living in older apartment towers without air conditioning as well as people experiencing homelessness or who are under-housed.

In 2017 a landlord registration by-law came into effect led by Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS). This by-law requires landlords to post the location of the nearest publicly accessible air conditioned building on an information bulletin board in the

building. In addition, TPH will continue to work closely with MLS on the workgroup that will report back to the Tenant Issues Committee on the feasibility issues related to providing air conditioning in multi-unit dwellings.

Collaboration among TPH, Municipal Licensing and Standards, and Social Development, Finance & Administration and City Planning needs to continue to further identify options for access to cool space through programs and communication in the short-term as well as policy in the long-term.

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration has a number of programs to support people experiencing homelessness and those who are under-housed. There is a need for TPH to collaborate with Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to identify ways to optimize existing services to provide access to cooling during hot weather for vulnerable populations.

The Environment and Energy Division is leading TransformTO, where there is alignment with the initiatives presented in this report. Collaboration between TPH and the Environment and Energy Division to enhance communication strategies such as a neighbour checking campaign as well as to work with Facilities Management to coordinate and publicize the addition of new organizations into the Heat Relief Network needs to be considered.

To facilitate the collaboration described in this report, the MOH recommends that an interim inter-divisional workgroup develop a coordinated City response to extreme heat for 2019 with a longer term approach being determined as part of the Resiliency Strategy. The work plan for this group would include strategies that have been shown to be effective elsewhere focusing on programs, communication, and policy initiatives.

Collectively, the City has a new focus on building City-wide resilience through the leadership of the Resilience Office. The City's forthcoming Resilience Strategy offers an opportunity to bring together and build upon the initiatives that are underway across divisions to increase climate resilience through a collective approach. One of the challenges that has been identified in the Strategy consultation process is the anticipated increase in the frequency and duration of heat events. As climate change continues to develop the impacts will need to be considered both strategically and operationally. Therefore the MOH also recommends that this report be shared with the ResilientTO Office for consideration in the Resiliency Strategy.

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SIGNATURE

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REFERENCES

1. Toronto Environment Office. 2012. Toronto's Future Weather and Climate Driver Study: Outcomes Report. Summary of the SENES Consultants Ltd. Study. Available at: http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/environment_and_energy/key_priorities/files/pdf/tfwcds-summary.pdf