TORONTO ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

tea

A Greener City for All

November 27, 2023

Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5H 2N2

RE: HL8.3 – Public Health Impacts of Climate Change in Toronto

Dear: Members of the Toronto Board of Health,

The Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) is very pleased to see Item HL8.3 – Public Health Impacts of Climate Change in Toronto be considered at today's meeting of the Board of Health. **TEA strongly supports the proposals made by City staff to monitor the impact of climate change on public health. And we have one recommendation to the program that we believe will have a significant benefit to the public health of the city.**

The Climate Emergency has a profound impact on public health. Extreme climate events experienced by cities include: extreme heat, such as the West Coast Heat Dome of 2021 which killed over 600 people; flooding events, such as the 2013 floods in Toronto; and extreme air quality events, such as the wildfire smoke experienced across Eastern Canada this past summer. Climate change can also bring with it extreme cold, new vector-borne diseases unseen in Toronto before such as Lyme Disease and West Nile Virus, and serious mental health issues such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress. For the safety of all Torontonians, it is vital that Toronto Public Health monitors these impacts.

In addition to the monitoring of areas that staff have outlined in Attachment 2, TEA strongly recommends that (a) indoor heat and (b) indoor air quality also be explicitly monitored by Toronto Public Health.

Torontonians spend most of our time indoors. As a result, indoor heat and indoor air quality have significant impacts on public health. We believe this monitoring is critically important for the health and well-being of all residents, and especially for those who are made disproportionately vulnerable to extreme climate events due to pre-existing health conditions, housing conditions, income, and other social determinants of health. The monitoring of indoor heat is vital as most fatalities during major heat events occur inside buildings. The B.C. Coroner's report on the 2021 heat dome found that *98% of fatalities* occurred indoors. It is also vital to measure indoor air quality from the combustion of fossil fuels. Climate change is directly linked to the combustion of fossil fuels, such as so-called 'natural' gas. According to the American Lung Association, the burning of fossil fuels is known to produce several airborne pollutants, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides (NOx), ammonia, formaldehyde, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs)—all of which can have severe health effects. Extreme climate events, such as extreme cold or extreme weather causing electricity blackouts, could lead to an increase in the indoor burning of wood, gas, and other fossil fuels, exacerbating indoor air quality even further.

In conclusion, Toronto Environmental Alliance strongly supports the monitoring of climate impacts by Toronto Public Health, and we recommend that TPH include (a) the monitoring of indoor heat, and (b) the monitoring of indoor air quality from fossil fuel combustion, as part of its Public Health Impacts of Climate Change program.

Sincerely,

How-Sen Chong
Climate Campaigner
Toronto Environmental Alliance