Clean Indoor Air Toronto

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City of Toronto Executive Committee
Toronto City Hall
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To the Executive Committee of the City of Toronto;

We are Clean Indoor Air Toronto (CIATO), a group of concerned residents who are dedicated to improving indoor air quality in our built environments. Many members of our group are parents/caregivers of children attending TDSB schools; other members have chronic health conditions that make them highly vulnerable to air pollution and infectious diseases. I am a chemist and the lead on science communications for our group.

We applaud the expansion of the City of Toronto's air conditioner program, and we urge this committee to proceed with implementation of a maximum indoor temperature by-law.

We also wish to point out that temperature is but one aspect of indoor air quality (IAQ). Indoor air quality comprises a number of different parameters, including carbon dioxide (CO_2), relative humidity, temperature, carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, TVOCs, and particulates (PM10).

The portable air conditioner units are welcome but they do not filter the air, they only cool recirculated indoor air. With climate change events becoming more severe and more intense, poor air quality often accompanies extreme heat. Over the past few years, we have seen wildfire smoke and urban air pollution combined with high heat. With the weakening jet stream and changing weather patterns, poor air quality is happening during cooler months as well. However, on poor air quality days, people are told to shelter indoors.

Many buildings in Toronto do not meet the current ventilation standards, ASHRAE Standard 62.1 and 62.2, as set forth by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), the professional organization that sets ventilation standards that are adopted by many countries, including Canada. This means sheltering indoors where indoor air quality is poor. Without adequate ventilation or filtration, air pollutants like wildfire smoke and smog will collect and concentrate. As well, the risk of airborne diseases is greatly increased in poorly ventilated spaces.

The City of Toronto has an IAQ policy for its office environments that lists a range for each of these parameters that constitute acceptable indoor air quality, and an acceptable maximum temperature. It is based on compliance with ASHRAE Standard 62.1 Unfortunately, at present, there is no city-wide IAQ policy that ensures all other buildings have acceptable indoor environmental conditions.

Access to safe and healthy indoor environmental conditions is a matter of equity. It should come as no surprise that many of the buildings which do not comply with ASHRAE Standard 62.1 typically include our public schools, shelters, long-term care homes (LTCs), older buildings including rental apartment buildings, and buildings in less affluent neighbourhoods. Poor air quality and poor indoor environmental conditions

have a disproportionate impact on our most vulnerable: children, seniors, tenants, and people with chronic health conditions.

We urge the City of Toronto to work towards implementing a city-wide IAQ policy, starting with providing guidance to the public, especially for building operators. We understand that it will take a considerable amount of investment to upgrade and retrofit buildings to improve IAQ, and ensure the buildings are resilient to the impacts of climate change and air pollution. However, we note that there are a number of existing programs that can be leveraged in order to protect residents, to prevent these costs from being downloaded onto individuals:

- Incentives for HVAC upgrades/retrofits under the TransformTO Net Zero program: please consider boosting this program to continue conversion of gas furnaces to heat pumps, thus supplying air conditioning to residents and removing a significant source of indoor air pollution. Expanding this program to subsidize the cost of MERV-13 filters in air-handling systems would provide protection against fine particulate air pollution from wildfires, combustion engines, and industry, as well as helping to reduce spread of airborne disease.
- Expansion of the air conditioner program for seniors and low-income residents to include portable air cleaners and MERV-13 filters. This air filtration equipment will help to protect against wildfire smoke, fine particulate air pollution, as well as helping to reduce indoor spread of airborne diseases.

In addition to the above, we call for the installation of an IAQ monitoring system in municipal buildings, schools, childcare centres, long-term care homes for seniors, shelters, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation, that allows building operators and members of the public to immediately see IAQ data for spaces within a building. It would allow us to see where there is poor air quality and where we should focus our efforts. A current example that the City of Toronto can look to is the IAQ monitoring system found in Boston Public Schools, funded by the City of Boston.

In September 2025, Health Canada issued IAQ guidance which can be used as a framework for developing guidance for the City of Toronto, and developing IAQ guidance. We urge the City of Toronto to work with Toronto Public Health to use the Health Canada to develop and implement IAQ policy and bylaw. Taking bold action now will improve indoor air quality for all residents, especially our most vulnerable — children, seniors, tenants, the disability community — and make our buildings more resilient to climate change and an ever-increasing burden of air pollution.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any additional information.

Yours Sincerely,

Louise Hidinger, Ph.D.
Science Communications & Strategy