

Actions Needed to Protect Toronto Tenants from Extreme Heat

Toronto Heat Safety

The City of Toronto must act now to prevent harmful health impacts and potential loss of life this summer, and accelerate the process to set an adequate temperature by-law for all rental units in Toronto.

ACORN, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, ARCH Disability Law Centre (ARCH), Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Climate Justice Toronto, Climate Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW), Low-Income Energy Network, Seniors for Climate Action Now! - Toronto, and Toronto Environmental Alliance call on the City of Toronto to implement the following actions to protect tenants from extreme heat:

1. **Establish an adequate temperature by-law by 2025** that will ensure that all residential rental units in the city can be kept at a temperature of no greater than 26° C. Another summer should not go by without the by-law being in place to protect tenants.
2. **Implement a program to provide and install free heat-pumps or air conditioners** to income-eligible tenants and seniors in Toronto.
3. **Provide income-eligible tenants with financial support** to cover any additional, ongoing utilities costs associated with using new active cooling infrastructure.
4. Expand current funding assistance programs to **provide landlords with funding to make capital expenditures** to upgrade buildings to be energy efficient and include active cooling infrastructure. The funding *must* stipulate that the costs of these capital upgrades cannot be passed on to tenants.
5. **Direct Toronto Public Health to track heat-related death and emergency room visits** related to exposure to heat during extreme heat events.
6. **Implement emergency measures:**
 - **Mandate that temporary cooling spaces** are air conditioned and available in all apartment buildings.
 - **Equip public and community spaces** - such as community centres, schools and libraries - to serve as cool spaces in the most impacted communities during extreme and prolonged heat waves.
 - **Provide free TTC rides on extreme heat days** to allow for mobile cooling and to make it easier for people suffering from heat to travel to cool public and community spaces.
 - **Protect vulnerable tenants in case of infrastructure failures**, such as ensuring there are backup power generators for apartments so that seniors and people with mobility devices are able to leave hot apartments during a heatwave-induced power outage.

Background Information

The Danger of Extreme Heat

Extreme heat is a serious and escalating public health emergency. Extreme heat is especially dangerous for elderly people, people with disabilities, people with certain pre-existing medical conditions or taking some medication, children, low-income tenants, and more isolated individuals.

The human body also requires cooling at night, and buildings that retain the heat of a hot day can be very hazardous or even fatal to human health.¹

Modeling from the City of Toronto forecasts that the number of days where the temperature exceeds 30 degrees Celsius will triple by 2040-2050, increasing from 20 days to 66 days every year.²

In Ontario, between 1996 and 2010, each five degrees Celsius increase in temperature during the summer was associated with a 2.5 percent increase in death, with a particular link to respiratory deaths.³

During the 2021 extreme heat event in British Columbia, the majority of deaths occurred inside people's homes. According to Dr. Sarah Henderson of the BC Centre of Disease Control, "People don't die because it is hot outside; they die because it is hot inside."⁴ 98% of the deaths that occurred during the BC extreme heat event occurred indoors.⁵

Recent City Actions

Toronto City Council requested a staff report on an adequate temperature by-law that was due in the first quarter of this year.⁶ However, that report has not yet been released.

The Toronto Board of Health has also instructed the Medical Officer of Health to begin monitoring climate change health impacts in the City. However, the first report on the climate change health surveillance framework is not due back to the Board of Health until the beginning of 2025.⁷

The City of Toronto currently has a by-law preventing tenants of multi-residential buildings from opening their windows more than 10 centimeters wide,⁸ which limits tenants' ability to cool their homes at night.

¹ "Why nighttime heat can be so dangerous – and why it's getting worse." CNN, June 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/30/weather/nighttime-heat-danger-climate-change-xpn-scn/index.html>

² Source: "Public Health Impacts of Climate Change in Toronto: A Path Forward for Responding to the Climate Crisis" Toronto Board of Health, <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-240681.pdf>, page 4

³ *ibid.* (see above, page 4)

⁴ Source: "Surviving the heat: The impacts of the 2021 western heat dome in Canada". Government of Canada. <https://science.gc.ca/site/science/en/blogs/science-health/surviving-heat-impacts-2021-western-heat-dome-canada>

⁵ Source: "Extreme Heat and Human Mortality: A Review of Heat-Related Deaths in B.C. in Summer 2021". Report to the Chief Coroner of British Columbia, June 2022, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/coroners-service/death-review-panel/extreme_heat_death_review_panel_report.pdf, p5

⁶ In June 2023, Toronto City Council adopted Item MM7.8: Request to Implement an Adequate Temperature By-law, calling for a report from staff by Q1 2024. <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.MM7.8>

⁷ Source: HL8.3 - Public Health Impacts of Climate Change in Toronto: A Path Forward for Responding to the Climate Crisis, <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL8.3>

⁸ Source: City of Toronto By-Law No. 930-2000, S.21 E <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/bylaws/2000/law0930.pdf>

About Toronto Heat Safety

The following organizations have endorsed this call to action



ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is a multi-issue, membership-based community union of low- and moderate-income people that has over 177,000 members organized into 30 neighbourhood chapters in 10 regions across 6 provinces.



Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE) is a specialty community legal clinic committed to upholding the rights of low-income seniors. Its purpose is to improve the quality of life of seniors by providing direct legal assistance, public legal education, law reform, community development, and community organizing.



Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) is a specialty community legal clinic with a mandate to advance and protect the interests of low-income tenants.



ARCH Disability Law Centre is a specialty community legal clinic dedicated to defending and advancing the equality rights, entitlements, fundamental freedoms, and inclusion of persons with disabilities in Ontario.



Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) supports physicians to be advocates for healthier environments and ecosystems and takes action to enable health for all by engaging with governments, running campaigns, conducting research, and drawing media attention to key issues.



Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) is a legal aid clinic dedicated to environmental equity, justice, and health. Founded in 1970, CELA is one of the oldest advocates for environmental protection in the country.



Climate Justice Toronto (CJTO) is a membership-led democratic organization fighting for transformative class-based climate action in Toronto and beyond.



Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW) inspires, enables, and supports community-led multi-generational, multi-stakeholder networking that increases awareness of local climate change impacts and promotes local resiliencies, especially for the more vulnerable.



Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) is a joint program of CELA and ACTO and envisions an Ontario where everyone has equitable access to conservation and financial assistance programs and services to meet their basic energy needs affordably and sustainably.



Seniors for Climate Action Now! (SCAN) - Toronto is a seniors' climate action group that is democratic, accountable, equitable, and participatory. SCAN! informs and mobilizes seniors in order to prevent more climate catastrophes.



Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) has campaigned locally to find solutions to Toronto's urban environmental problems for over 35 years and advocates on behalf of all Torontonians for a green, healthy, and equitable city.