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Peterborough Public Health Urges Government of Canada to Explore Improvements to Funding Streams to Supporting Small Businesses and Other Organizations to Improve Indoor Air Quality

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, MP
Minister of Health, Canada
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The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, MP
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure
and Communities, Canada
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Dear Honourable Ministers:

Re: Improved Indoor Air Quality in Public Settings

We've learned a great deal about COVID-19 since the pandemic began, most notably, is that **COVID-19 is an airborne virus**,[1] and does not spread as easily as we once thought by touching contaminated surfaces.[2] The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety states that "the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads from a person that is infected through the air, by respiratory droplets and aerosols."[3] Additionally, the Ontario Science Table noted that "aerosols play a role in the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, especially in poorly ventilated indoor areas."[4]

While provincially legislated 'lockdowns', mask mandates, and gathering limits may be behind us, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. With all that we have learned, **improvements to indoor air quality of the spaces we occupy are necessary and life-saving** to truly control how the SARS-CoV2 virus and other respiratory/airborne pathogens spread. One important strategy to support this change would be through tax credits, grants, or other incentives to support small businesses in improving the indoor air quality of their spaces.

Canada's Chief Science Advisor recommends that owners and operators of indoor public facilities "scale-up and monitor effective prevention interventions, such as improving ventilation in schools, workplaces and public places as part of a first line of prevention of SARS-CoV2 infection and other respiratory/airborne pathogens."[5] These sentiments are echoed by the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) Indoor Air Quality group who have created many tools and resources to help Ontarians. Recommendations OSPE have developed, include:

- increasing the minimum number of air exchanges to at least 6 per hour in any indoor occupied space;
- improving ventilation requirements to follow the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) and the Canadian Standards Association;
- ensuring that HVAC systems and portable units use at least MERV 13 rated filters, and that portable filters with HEPA filters are in occupied spaces where air quality is a concern;

- having certified technicians install upper room ultraviolet germicidal systems; and
- committing to public transparency about the air quality of a space.[6]

To this end, there are many examples of improved indoor air quality being prioritized around the world. Last year for example, Belgium legislated an indoor air quality framework[7], as did France[8], while Australia earmarked over $270 million AUD for classroom upgrades alone to further "provide their students with improved learning facilities in a COVID-19 safe environment".[9]

In an effort to make public indoor spaces safer, and recognizing that COVID-19 is airborne, Peterborough Public Health (PPH) is urging the Government of Canada and its provincial and territorial partners to consider similar initiatives as these other global leaders, and explore a variety of options that support businesses and organizations in protecting their staff and patrons – most notably through improvements to their HVAC and ventilation systems, as detailed above.

PPH recently identified that because of local and provincial protections, 265-291 lives were saved in the area served by our Health Unit[10], while the CD HOWE Institute found that vaccines alone contributed to a "cost/benefit of -$0.4 billion to $2.1 billion without considering mortality."[11] Including the value of reduced mortality, this figure balloons to "$27.6 billion, dwarfing the costs of the vaccines and savings associated with averting more minor cases."[12] Given that a multilayer approach – including improved ventilation - is needed when preventing the transmission of COVID-19, **it is clear that the costs of inaction with the toll of COVID-19 transmission and other respiratory viruses is significant.**

As the Chair of our Board of Health I am writing to you today, to urge that the Federal government, in partnership with all provincial and territorial governments, identify, fund, and implement strategies such as through grants, tax breaks, and other incentives, to improve indoor air quality in public settings.

The staff at PPH and I are ready to support your teams in moving this forward; please don't hesitate to reach out if we can be of assistance.

Respectfully,

Original signed by

Councillor Kathryn Wilson
Chair, Board of Health

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cc: Local MPs
Local MPPs
Curve Lake First Nation
Hiawatha First Nation
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Boards of Health

[1] Public Health Agency of Canada. (2022). COVID-19: Main modes of transmission. Retrieved October 18, 2022 from: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/main-modes-transmission.html

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[3] Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). (2022). COVID-19 transmission through short and long-range respiratory particles. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved October 11, 2022 from https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/nCoV/phm/2022/01/covid-19-respiratory-transmission-range.pdf?sc_lang=en

[4] Science M, Thampi N, Bitnun A, et al. (2022). Infection prevention and control considerations for schools during the 2022- 2023 academic year. Science Briefs of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table. Retrieved October 11, 2022 from https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Infection-Prevention-and-Control-Considerations-for-Schools-During-the-2022-2023-Academic-Year_20220825_published.pdf

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[7] Vandenbroucke, F.Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Affairs and Health. Chancellery of the Prime Minister. (2022). Indoor air quality: future policy and legislative framework. Retrieved February 13, 2023 from https://vandenbroucke.belgium.be/nl/binnenluchtkwaliteit-beleid-van-de-toekomst-en-wetgevend-kader

[8] Sub-section 3: Indoor air quality monitoring in certain establishments open to the public (Articles R221-30 to D221-38). Retrieved February 13, 2023 from https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/section_lc/LEGITEXT000006074220/LEGISCTA000024912670/

[9] Australian Government. (2022). Schools Upgrade Fund. Retrieved, February 13, 2023 from https://www.education.gov.au/schools-upgrade-fund

[10] Peterborough Public Health. (2022). Peterborough Public Health Thanks Community for Efforts in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic to Date. Retrieved March 2, 2023 from https://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/peterborough-public-health-thanks-community-for-efforts-in-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic-to-date/

[11] Wyonch, Rosalie, and Tingting Zhang. 2022. Damage Averted: Estimating the Effects of COVID-19 Vaccines on Hospitalizations, Mortality and Costs in Canada. Commentary 634. Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute. Retrieved March 3, 2023 from https://www.cdhowe.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/Commentary_634.pdf

[12] Ibid.