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Alliance for Healthier Communities

Alliance pour des communautés en santé

Submission to the Finance Committee

Pre-Budget Consultations re: COVID19 Economic Recovery

August 6, 2020

Introduction

These recommendations are offered to the Finance Committee by **Creating Healthy and Sustainable Environments** ([CHASE](#)), the **Canadian Public Health Association** ([CPHA](#)), the **Ontario Public Health Association** ([OPHA](#)), and the [Alliance for Healthier Communities](#) on August 6, 2020.

Mitigate Catastrophic Outcomes from Climate Change

The COVID19 economic recovery provides us with once in a life-time opportunity to mitigate climate change and address the health inequities exacerbated by both [COVID19](#) and climate change.

As disruptive as the pandemic has been to the health and well-being of Canadians, it pales in comparison to the disruption that will occur if global warming continues unabated. We are at a cross-roads with climate change. To quote earth scientist, Professor Rob Jackson, from [Stanford University](#), “What we do now will define the fate of the planet – and human life on it – for decades.”

In the last few decades, we have seen rising sea levels on three coastlines, melting permafrost in the far north, and an increase in the frequency and intensity of heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods, hurricanes, and ice storms across Canada as global warming has approached [1°C](#).

In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ([IPCC](#)) detailed the catastrophic impacts that could be expected if we allow global warming to increase by 1.5 to 2°C. It determined that [hundreds of millions more people](#) will experience climate-induced poverty each year with 2°C of warming than would with 1.5°C of warming. It concluded that, globally, we must reduce climate emissions by about 45% of 2010 levels by 2030 and to net-zero by 2050, if we are to limit global warming to [1.5°C](#).

We are encouraged by the government's [announcement](#) to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, but note that as a wealthy country that is among the top ten emitters of climate [emissions](#), this is the least that is expected of us. The major sources of climate [emissions](#) in Canada are: the oil and gas sector (25% of domestic emissions); the transportation sector (25%); electricity generation (11%); heavy industry (11%); buildings (11%); and agriculture (10%).

Reduce Health Inequities

The pandemic has shone a light on the health inequities in Canada. COVID19 outcomes are determined by social determinants of health which create and maintain avoidable inequalities. Racism and income are critical determinants that have impacted COVID19 outcomes. Workers in agriculture, food processing, retail, and care work (the vast majority of whom are racialized) have been deemed essential, while also being among the lowest-paid and least protected workers in [Canada](#). Newly released data for Toronto has demonstrated that families with the lowest incomes and racialized populations have [much higher COVID19 infection rates](#) than wealthier families and white populations. COVID19 outcomes in Ontario are deeply influenced by systemic and structural inequalities. These higher rates can be attributed largely to inequitable working conditions, inadequate supports, crowded housing, systemic and structural racism.

Climate change poses physical and mental health risks to all Canadians, but it [poses a greater risk for our most vulnerable populations](#). The elderly, those with chronic diseases, and those who live on low incomes have been, and will be, the hardest hit by heat waves, flooding, wildfires and rising food prices. People in the far North, particularly Indigenous and Inuit people in northern communities, will have to contend with increasing food insecurity as melting permafrost and unstable ice roads reduce their access to traditional foods and supplies from the [South](#). Climate change will deepen the health inequities within communities already experiencing intersectional inequality such as poverty and racism.

The 10-year \$40 billion [National Housing Strategy](#) announced in the 2017 Federal Budget promises to create more affordable housing for low income populations. It is essential however to also upgrade [existing housing](#) for these populations to improve indoor air quality and protect them from heat waves and floods, while also reducing their housing energy costs.

Net Zero Plan for 2050

Energy and financial analysts, [Torrie](#), Bak and Heaps, have determined that the federal government could create more than five million job-years of employment by greening Canada's power grid, electrifying the transportation sector, and upgrading our homes and workplaces by 2030, by investing \$10 billion per year for the next decade. These "Build Back Better" investments would put us on the path to a net zero future, save Canadians \$39 billion per year in fuel costs, and create millions of high-quality [jobs](#).

The Build Back Better plan proposed would:

- **Deeply retrofit 60% of homes and commercial and institutional workplaces by 2030**, creating more than 3 million jobs cumulatively and reducing greenhouse gases (GHGs) by 58 million tonnes (Mt) per year;
- **Build a carbon-free electricity grid** to serve all parts of the country, creating almost one million job cumulatively and eliminating 75 Mt of GHGs over 10 years;
- **Electrify 100% of new passenger vehicles and 75-80% of trucks by 2030**, creating 642,000 jobs cumulatively, saving drivers \$22.8 billion annually at the pump, and reducing GHGs by 63 Mt per year;
- **Increase pedestrian and cycling infrastructure across the country**, creating 18,000 jobs over two years;
- **Catalyze a zero carbon economy** that creates 500,000 person-years of employment by 2030, while significantly reducing GHG emissions from existing sectors;
- **Set Canada’s heavy industry on a pathway to decarbonization**, supporting 23,000 high-quality jobs, while reducing GHGs by 8 Mt per year by 2030;
- **Support farmers to convert marginal agricultural lands and use less nitrogen**, creating nearly 60,000 cumulative jobs, and sequestering and reducing GHGs by 22 Mt per year, by 2030; and
- **Restoring degraded lands and urban forests**, creating 144,000 cumulative jobs, and reducing GHGs by 13.5 Mt per year, by 2030.

Climate Actions Produce Immediate Health Benefits

Many of these investments will also produce significant and immediate health benefits and healthcare savings. In 2019, Health Canada estimated that air pollution from human activity is responsible for 14,600 premature deaths, 2.7 million asthma symptom days, and 35 million acute respiratory symptom days each year. These health benefits were valued at [\\$114 billion per year \(2015\)](#).

Investments directed at [electrifying vehicles](#), improving public transit, [developing renewables](#), improving energy efficiency, and transforming the oil and gas sector and heavy industry would avoid many early deaths, reduce rates of heart disease, asthma and lung cancer, and cut healthcare costs [by reducing air pollution](#). For example, a new study demonstrated that the electrification of all cars and SUVs in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area could prevent [313 premature deaths every year](#), while reducing GHGs by 7.6 Mt per year.

Chronic diseases cost governments in Canada approximately [\\$200 billion per year in treatment and lost-time](#). Increased levels of physical activity resulting from investments in [public transit, cycling and walking](#), would save lives, reduce rates of heart disease, diabetes and cancer, and cut healthcare costs, while reducing [climate emissions](#).

Approximately 84% of the land in Canada is forested and an additional 158 million acres are dedicated to [agriculture](#). Forests and agriculture are both susceptible to extreme weather and capable of sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. By investing in nature-based climate solutions, we can avert the biodiversity and [climate crises](#), while decreasing the vulnerability of nearby communities to extreme weather events and increasing our long-term food security. By investing in [parks, greenspaces and](#)

[agriculture](#) in urban centres, we can improve mental health, reduce the intensity of heat waves and food insecurity, and cultivate social cohesion.

Climate Actions Can Reduce Health Equities

If properly directed, these investments could also reduce health inequities in our society. Investments in public transit, bike lanes, low-income housing, urban gardens, greenspace, and Indigenous communities could increase community resilience and produce health and social benefits for marginalized populations. If paired with re-training and re-tooling funds, these investments could also help transition workers, industries and communities impacted by the phase-out of fossil fuels and the technologies that rely upon them.

The COVID19 economic recovery provides us with an opportunity that we could not have anticipated. The investments needed to invigorate our economy can help us avoid catastrophic climate change, increase the resiliency of our communities, and create a more equitable and healthy society for all.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the government develop and implement an effective and evidence-based climate action plan to achieve the emission reductions needed to keep global warming below 1.5°C which includes enforceable emission reduction targets, emissions monitoring, and transparent reporting mechanisms.

Recommendation 2: That the government increase dedicated funding to the public health sector by \$100 million each year to:

- a) Support the development and implementation of local and regional climate change health vulnerability assessments and adaptation plans;
- b) Establish one or more pan-Canadian inter-jurisdictional collaborative(s) to:
 - i) support best practice information-sharing between public health authorities;
 - ii) standardize surveillance and reporting of climate-related health risks and impacts;
 - iii) better identify and prioritize actions to protect health;
 - iv) develop knowledge translation strategies to inform the public; and
 - v) generate public health response plans that minimize the health impacts of climate change and realize the health co-benefits of climate action; and
- c) Increase funding for research on the mental health impacts of climate change and psychosocial adaptation opportunities.

Recommendation 3: That the government phase out [fossil fuel subsidies](#) and redirect those funds to the economic recovery.

Recommendation 4: That the government support the deep retrofit of homes, buildings and workplaces with [\\$20 billion over 10 years](#) with most spent in the first two years, giving priority to low-income neighbourhoods, Indigenous communities, and hospitals, schools and other publicly-owned institutions.

Recommendation 5: That the government train a green building workforce with [\\$1.25 billion](#) giving priority to marginalized groups including Black and Indigenous People and People of Colour;

Recommendation 6: That the government provide a rental top-up to CERB to [prevent arrears and loss of housing](#) resulting from COVID-19.

Recommendation 7: That the government invest in the decarbonization of the transportation sector with [\\$12 billion](#); establish an ambitious schedule to ensure that 100% of new cars and SUVs and 75-80% of all new trucks, sold in 2030, are electric; and work with the provinces/territories and municipalities to ensure that public transit systems and school boards receive funding to invest in electric vehicles.

Recommendation 8: That the government invest in active mobility with [\\$2 billion over 5 years](#); work with provinces/territories and municipal leaders to encourage the development of walkable and transit-supportive communities; prioritize low-income neighbourhoods for funding; and invest in a rebate program that encourages the purchase of electric bicycles.

Recommendation 9: That the government invest in [Free and Safe Transit Fund](#) with \$6 billion for one year to support low income populations and students, ensure the safety of public transit, and stimulate the economy.

Recommendation 10: That the government invest in building a carbon-free, resilient electricity system that is essential as our homes, buildings, vehicles and factories shift from fossil fuels to electricity with [\\$2.7 billion per year until 2025](#) to support the development of transmission lines and storage;

Recommendations 11: That the government invest in the decarbonization of Canada's heavy industry sector with a federal investment fund with a maximum of [\\$4.8 billion over 10 years](#).

Recommendation 12: That the government invest in conservation, restoration and land management of forests and agriculture with [\\$4.2 billion for agriculture and \\$16 billion for forests](#) to restore degraded land over 10 years and to work with provincial/territorial and municipal governments to encourage investments in urban green space and urban agriculture.

Recommendation 13: That the government establish a Natural Resources and Electric Vehicle Innovation fund with [\\$40 billion over 10 years](#) to support growing markets for energy from solar, wind and hydro; develop the electric vehicle industry; and develop markets for the oil and gas sector that do not involve combustion.

Recommendation 14: That the government establish a Just Transition program with [\\$450 million per year](#) to support an equitable transition for farmers, workers, and communities impacted by the shift to a low-carbon economy.