

For Immediate Release

Advocates call for Ontario to improve tracking of heat-related deaths as impacts of climate crisis threaten vulnerable populations

Toronto, ON – July 19th, 2021 – Advocates from the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO), The Advocacy Centre for Elderly (ACE), The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), and the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN) are raising the alarm about the growing impact of heat-related deaths in Ontario, as the incidence of extreme heat days increase due to the intensifying climate crisis. Dubbed as a “silent killer”, heat waves have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities. Unlike many other provinces in Canada, including Quebec and British Columbia, Ontario under-reports premature deaths caused by extreme heat. ACTO, ACE, CELA and LIEN are calling for the Office of the Chief Coroner in Ontario to improve its tracking of heat-related deaths in the province during extreme heat events.

Ontario on track for more extreme heat

The incidence of extreme heat waves across Canada has had tragic consequences in the past few weeks, [with an estimated 800 heat-related deaths occurring in British Columbia alone](#). Scientists have emphasized [that similar heat waves will become more frequent over time due to climate crisis impacts](#). In Ontario, the [number of days above the threshold for heat-related deaths will increase by 1.5 times by the 2050s](#), with the province projected to have one of the greatest numbers of potentially deadly hot days nationwide annually by the 2080s. The City of Toronto experienced 20 days throughout the 2000s where temperatures were over 30 degrees Celsius, [but between 2040 and 2049 the number of days are predicted to increase to 66](#).

Currently, Ontario only tracks sudden and unexpected deaths where heat is the direct cause of death. Individuals are not required to report “natural” deaths to the Coroner’s Office, [even if extreme heat worsens an individual’s chronic health condition and causes eventual death](#).

“We are gravely concerned about current rate and the projected increases of extreme heat across Ontario in the coming decades,” says Douglas Kwan, Director of Advocacy and Legal Services at ACTO. “Currently, the way the province tracks heat-related deaths is inadequate, making it impossible to accurately assess the impact extreme heat is already having on low-income tenants and other vulnerable communities across the province. We need more robust data to make sound policy decisions.”

Impacts on vulnerable communities severe

Vulnerable people are more prone to heat-related death - especially the elderly, children, people living with chronic health conditions, individuals without housing, and low-income tenants who do not have adequate means to cool their homes during heat waves. Vulnerable populations need better protection from extreme heat from public health measures and laws.

“Premature death due to incidence of extreme heat is a major concern for our client community,” says Jane Meadus, Staff Lawyer and Institutional Advocate at ACE. “Elderly people are disproportionately impacted by heat waves, for many reasons. Heat waves don’t restrict themselves to provincial borders – if we are seeing higher rates of heat-related deaths in Montreal, why do the numbers in Ontario remain so low?”

With the climate crisis worsening, it is essential that the Coroner’s Office improves its tracking of heat-related deaths to better capture the true impact of extreme heat in Ontario. Doing so will allow for government policy to address the full extent of the problem.



Advocacy Centre
for Tenants Ontario

Tenant Duty
Counsel Program



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“This is just the first step of many,” says Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director of CELA. “We need to take urgent action now to safeguard the health of all Ontarians, and it starts with accurately understanding the scope of the problem. Future generations are counting on us.”

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About ACTO, ACE, CELA & LIEN

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) is a specialty community legal clinic with a province-wide mandate to advance and protect the interests of tenants living on lower incomes. ACTO specializes in housing issues related to tenants. The clinic also coordinates the Tenant Duty Counsel Program (TDCP) across Ontario, which provides legal information and assistance to self-represented tenants appearing at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE) is a specialty community legal clinic that was established to provide a range of legal services to low-income seniors in Ontario. The legal services include advice and representation to individual and group clients, public legal education, law reform and community development activities.

The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) is a legal aid clinic established in 1970 for the purpose of using and improving existing laws to protect low-income people from environmental harm. As an Ontario legal aid clinic, CELA's top priority is to represent low-income individuals and communities. CELA is a founding member of LIEN.

LIEN is a joint program of ACTO and CELA and is funded by Legal Aid Ontario. Its vision is an Ontario where everyone has equitable access to conservation and financial assistance programs and services to meet their basic energy needs affordably and sustainably.

For more information including interviews with ACE and CELA representatives:

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