

Low-Income Energy Network Conference Notes 2022

Q&A Session

1. **What can municipalities do to encourage/require large property owners/landlords to upgrade and retrofit their properties to reduce emissions and protect resident health?**
 - Incentive programs but also legal requirements that apply across the province, because we don't want people to fall through the cracks.
2. **I find that the larger challenge for municipalities is lacking the powers of enforcement (which also helps with data collection and tracking) to ensure their bylaws actually have effect. Do the legal precedents apply to enforcement?**
 - In terms of enforcement powers for municipalities, the Municipal Act has a section specific to enforcement. Recommend to look at that.
3. **What about new builds? They are talking about creating new buildings - are they required to have AC or other cooling methods - is any working at changing building codes?**
 - If the new buildings had a mandatory requirement of AC, we could go a long way. But with landlords, it's often something they don't want to do because of the extra costs.
4. **What practices and measures exist in communities to be able to check in on seniors?**
 - We often think of cooling centers but those can be very inaccessible. And checking in on people doesn't really prevent the issue. It's reactive. But not a great option.
5. **Do you think the National and Ontario Building Codes need to change to require new builds for LTC and RH and Nursing Homes to require central AC? I wonder if the requirements for LTC homes is not strong enough and there are loopholes.**
 - They still use the 2015 building code, but it's unclear if new buildings being built will have to have AC or will need to be retrofitted after.
6. **What is the role of the federal government in all this?**
 - There are a number of actions proposed in the national adaptation strategy. In the Canada greener homes grants, for example, that's something the public can access. But we need to roll out new programs for climate resilience as well. But these programs often don't talk about extreme heat at all.
 - It's important we push the feds to go from a national adaptation plan to an implementation plan because we have been talking about this plan for almost 20 years, but it's how do we implement it that's the issue.
 - We also have to ensure people keep working together across sectors on these issues to really push this adaptation strategy that can and will be implemented. It's also important to note that low income homeowners lack the capacity to pay the upfront money and that these federal programs just pay you back, so that doesn't work for everyone. And renters are totally left out as well.
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Breakout Rooms

Question 1: Given what we have learned today, what should be our priorities and goals for the next 3-5 years?

Key Ideas

1. Advocating for better collection of data on heat-related deaths in Ontario
2. Financial pressure on landlords to provide funding to ensure the costs of mandatory upgrades won't be passed onto tenants
3. For policy development on cooling and heating, we need to advocate for controlling costs
4. Maximum indoor temperatures in Canada
5. Low-income barrier studies must be completed to best target the needs of low-income and otherwise vulnerable individuals

In-depth Notes

- Implementing the maximum heat by-law
 - ACORN Hamilton working on this
 - Working on retrofits and encouraging landlords to do so
 - We should link to a concept of responsibility and not put the responsibility on the people that are most vulnerable
- Put more financial pressure on landlords to provide funding to ensure the costs of mandatory upgrades won't be passed onto tenants. This might mean lobbying and tenant organizing.
 - Tenants don't know their rights so it's important to get the information out there about tenant rights and how things should change.
 - But tenants are so scared to get evicted so that makes people hesitant to move. They are scared they are going to lose their homes because landlords have so much power.
 - If there were programs to help with landlords with the costs of implementing energy efficiency measures or things like that, maybe that would entice them. But the issue is they want their costs right away and so they often just pass those on to the landlords.
 - Suggest purchase of heat pumps and long-term repayment by adding to hydro bills
- Engaging community partners to check on vulnerable communities during extreme heat
 - 3-5 years is too long of a timeline to address certain concerns including heat-related deaths
- Potentially implementing a target of 30% tree canopy cover in every square kilometer of the city which will ensure equitable distribution of green infrastructure
- Low-income barrier studies to be completed to best target the needs of low-income and vulnerable communities
- Preventing heat-stress and illness in outdoor workers, or indoor workers employed in greenhouses
- Improving heat-related death tracking (where and who is dying)
 - How health units respond to heat data - Ontario Public Health Association made this data to show public officials that this is a health hazard, and we need to address this
- Energy poverty: For policy development on cooling and heating, we need to advocate for controlling costs
 - Delivery charges get tacked onto hydro bills - advocacy work could be done on this
 - Implement programs that are grant-based or like green bare homes Canada.
 - You have to come up front with the money, but you don't get all of the money back for the retrofit cost. It's an incentive especially for low-income folks and seniors on fixed incomes

- Lobby municipalities (for homeowners not tenants) to set up a repayment plan so they can collect and save through tax i.e., if they call someone to fix an A.C, they get some money back.

Question #2: What are some challenges and opportunities that we are likely to encounter?

Key Ideas

- Massive issue with funding and enforcement
- Re Maximum Heat By-law: concerns with where the money is coming from and concern that costs are passed onto the tenant
- Some people can't leave their apartments for health or mobility issues or single parents etc. so solutions need to be in their apartments
- Do we need other measures alongside air-conditioning in case the power goes out or because air-conditioning uses energy

In-depth Notes

- For the role of mechanical cooling and heating, such as heat pumps, we need to come up with clear messaging. Some contribute to climate change, and we need to move past this issue otherwise people get stuck in.
- For energy efficiency for buildings, if we don't do it right, we could have more health impact from radon
 - There is a need to do research in this area
 - Will energy efficiency improve or reduce air quality
- Problem with air conditioning - pumping hot air into the environment and participating to the ambient temperature rise
- Right now, it's so overwhelming and disheartening, the problems seem so big (hurricanes, floods, fires, etc.) so it's hard for people to wrap their heads around it.
- In northern Ontario, people install wood stoves, to save on utilities because it's so cold there so they must heat more. Some of the First Nations communities there had distribution costs removed from their bills so that helped, but some communities don't have any gas and its only electric heat so it's very expensive.
- Some tenants do try to reduce risks (example: putting plants on balconies) but then the landlords say no it's going to cause problems so bring your plants inside. Or even clotheslines on balconies, same thing.
- Some tenants get disconnected from their hydro, but do the hydro-companies play a role in lowering those costs?
- If the power goes out during a heat wave and we only focused on air conditioning and not any passive measures, then we will still be in trouble
- There should also be heat captains to check in on everyone on their floor, maybe the superintendent?
- Thinking some people can't actually leave their apartments for health or mobility issues or single parents etc. so solutions need to be in their apartments
- We need examples of other places that did these things and help us how to move forward

Question 3: Given these priorities, challenges and opportunities, what are some immediate actions / next steps you / your organization can commit to taking in the near-term?

Key Ideas

1. Education at the municipal level – municipal partners do not have awareness about what their role is.
2. Bringing the maximum heat by-law to counsel and municipal bodies
3. Collaboration and communication so that no one is working in silos
4. Ensuring data exists so people who know it can give evidence for policy recommendations and conversations
5. Political will and money will need to be invested into this issue. Need to put pressure on those with the purse strings to make the necessary changes

In-depth Notes

- Education at the municipal level – municipal partners do not have awareness about what their role is.
- Bringing the maximum heat by-law to counsel and municipal bodies – ask about it at municipal election meetings
 - Sharing information about when a municipality has successfully passed a maximum heat by-law – utilize each other's success stories
- Collaborations between clinics, non-profits and other groups so no one is working in silos
- Learn more about what people can do personally and how to also put pressure on elected officials
- Education again, not just tenants and landlords, but mostly educate people on climate change and how every single person will be affected
- The most vulnerable people need to be a part of the conversation because the people who make these decisions live in big houses with air conditioning
- Helpful to see what other communities doing and ask why we are not doing the same