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Local health unit to study climate change impacts across region

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Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health and the Region of Waterloo Pubic Health are collaborating to study health vulnerabilities and the impact of climate change in our communities.

?This is a project of adapting to the reality of climate change in our area,? said Chuck Ferguson, Manager of Communications at Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health.

Mandated by the Province and with funding by the federal government, the two public health institutions' collaboration will focus on health vulnerabilities impacted by climate change in Waterloo Region, Guelph and Dufferin and Wellington counties. The team's research will address rising temperatures, extreme weather, vector-borne diseases ? Lyme disease and West Nile virus ? food and water-borne illness and air pollution.

The study will examine ?what interventions can public health have that make sure people stay well when we are experiencing the impacts of climate change, which we already are, and they're going to get more extreme as we move forward,? said Mr. Ferguson.

The two public health units jointly applied for funding from Health Canada and were awarded $300,000 for the project. The funding will cover research into data gaps in the public health institutions.

?What we're doing currently is we're structuring the project. We're identifying what we know, what we need to know, and we'll go out and build those information gaps and really come up with different strategies to mitigate different risks based on the needs of the community or population that we're working with,? said Mr. Ferguson.

He said the $300,000 is more than enough to fund the project and gives residence assurances that the Public Health agencies will look deep into understanding the issues and building strategies that will make a difference.

As part of the project the public health agencies will be working with ICLEI Canada (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives), a non-profit organization that works to build and serve local and regional governments that are working towards improvements in local sustainability.

The institutions will also be working with consultant Dr. Chris Buse from the University of British Columbia, a specialist in linking health and climate change Mr. Ferguson told the Citizen. Mr. Buse in 2018 published an article in the Canadian Journal of Public Health focused on why public health agencies should study climate change and health vulnerabilities.

?We are asking these consultants to look at all the communities involved, which includes all of Waterloo Region, Wellington County, Dufferin County and the City of Guelph. What they're doing is looking where the most vulnerable populations are and how do we help them,? said Mr. Ferguson, ?whether that be elderly residents, whether that be rural residents. We just really want to identify where the risks are and come up with strategies to help mitigate them.?

The project, which is already under way, is set to run over the next three years.