

Heat Wave Response A Very Brief Public Health Ethics Case

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This short document presents a case study comprising a scenario and accompanying resources for further reading. We originally produced this case for use during a webinar held in October 2015.¹ We have adapted this and other cases and republished them together so that they might be used in combination with the summary versions of ethics frameworks for public health that we have produced to date. They are intended to give public health practitioners some material for practice in ethical deliberation.

Case

Your health unit has been asked to review the municipality's *Heat Alert and Response Plan*.

One of the plan's key elements is the provision of neighbourhood cooling centres during heat waves. However, some neighbourhoods, particularly low-income areas where the need is greatest, are thought to lack suitable facilities for cooling centres.

One option is to bus at-risk individuals to air conditioned shopping malls, community centres, sports facilities, etc. in other neighbourhoods.

Instructions

Through deliberation, please:

- Identify the ethical issues that arise in this case.
- Make a decision about whether your health unit should
 - Approve this plan
 - Approve a modified version of the plan
 - Reject this plan / propose an alternative.
- Give reasons for your decisions.

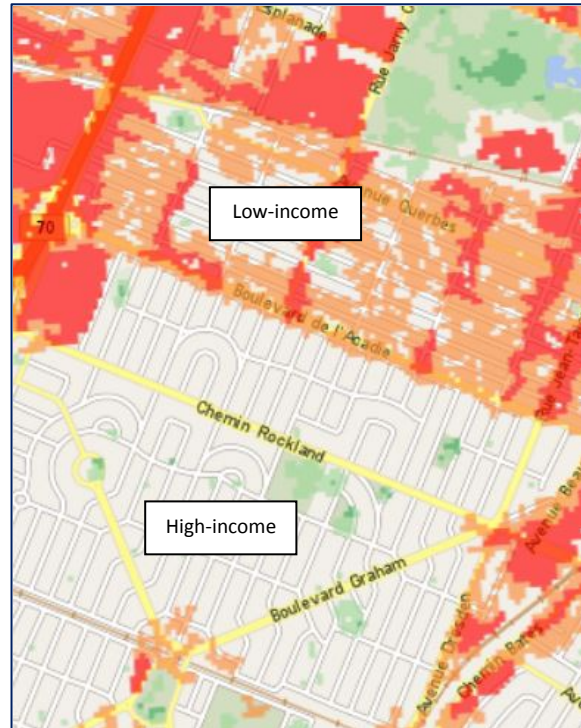


Figure 1 Heat islands in higher-income and lower-income Montréal neighbourhoods



Source: <http://geoegl.msp.gouv.qc.ca/gouvouvert/?id=temperature>.

This open data is used under the open data use licence of the governmental administration available at this web address: www.donnees.gouv.qc.ca. The granting of this licence does not imply endorsement by the governmental administration of the use which is made of that data [Translation].

Licence: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/infra-geo-ouverte/igo/master/LICENSE_ENGLISH.txt

¹ The PowerPoint and recording of the webinar are available online at: http://www.ncchpp.ca/128/Presentations.ccnpps?id_article=1491



Some considerations

- Cool environments work (NCCEH, 2008; O'Neill et al., 2009) ... **but it is not a case of “if you build it, they will come”**.
- The most vulnerable tend to not want to leave their neighbourhoods (Merkes, 2014).
- Many do not identify themselves as at risk (Merkes, 2014).
- People with mental illness are particularly at risk (Price, Perron, & King, 2013).

Resources and additional reading

Adapted summaries of public health ethics frameworks and cases:

http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=1525

A repertoire of ethics frameworks for public health (with links to the documents):

http://www.ncchpp.ca/708/Repertoire_of_Frameworks.ccnpps

Population and Public Health Ethics: Cases from research, policy, and practice

This book brings together 16 cases of ethical issues encountered across a range of public health issues and sectors and presents accompanying analyses by leading experts in public health ethics.

http://www.ncchpp.ca/127/Publications.ccnpps?id_article=720

References

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- National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health (NCCEH). (2008). *Current evidence on the effectiveness of interventions during heat episodes*. Retrieved from: http://www.ncceh.ca/sites/default/files/Heat_Interventions_Sept_2008.pdf
- O'Neill, M. S., Rebecca, C., Kish, J. K., Gronlund, C. J., White-Newsome, J. L., Manarolla, X., Zanobetti, A., & Schwartz, J. D. (2009). Preventing heat-related morbidity and mortality: New approaches in a changing climate. *Maturitas*, 64(2), 98–103. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2793324/>
- Price, K., Perron, S., & King, N. (2013). Implementation of the Montreal heat response plan during the 2010 heat wave. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 104(2), 96-100.

Questions or comments?

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