

January 28, 2026

Dear Members of the Budget Committee,

ATTN: Budget Committee | RE: Support for Indoor Air Quality investments

We are writing to urge you to invest in policies and actions that improve indoor air quality (IAQ) in Toronto's buildings, with particular attention to the low-income tenants and vulnerable communities who are most affected by poor indoor environments.

Across Toronto, many residents – especially those living in older, poorly maintained rental buildings – are exposed daily to poor air quality and inadequate ventilation, due to aging HVAC systems and a lack of air conditioning. These conditions are far more common in low-income housing, rooming houses, and other forms of sub-standard housing, where tenants often have little power to demand improvements. As a result, those already facing social and economic inequities are disproportionately burdened by poor indoor air quality.

Without proper ventilation, harmful air pollution from both indoor and outdoor sources can build up inside homes. Climate change has made this problem far more severe: heat waves, wildfire smoke, and poor air quality days are becoming more frequent and intense each year. Residents of inadequately ventilated buildings – many of whom are seniors, people with disabilities, newcomers, and low-income families – are left with no safe refuge from extreme heat or polluted air. These risks do not end with the summer months. During colder weather, when people are forced to remain indoors, poor ventilation significantly increases the spread of airborne illnesses, as seen during the major surge in influenza cases beginning in December 2025.

We recognize that the City of Toronto has an IAQ policy for its own offices.¹ However, there is currently no comprehensive, broadly protective IAQ policy that safeguards residents across Toronto's housing stock, particularly renters living in older and under-resourced buildings.

In September 2025, Health Canada released updated guidance for IAQ professionals.² This guidance provides a strong, evidence-based foundation for policymakers to develop IAQ standards that would ensure better ventilation and healthier indoor environments for all residents, regardless of income or housing type.

We support Clean Indoor Air Toronto's petition to the Board of Health to direct Toronto Public Health to adopt this new Health Canada guidance. Aligning public health planning with the latest IAQ standards is a critical step toward protecting Torontonians, especially those who face the greatest exposure and the fewest alternatives.

We also urge the Budget Committee to support Clean Indoor Air Toronto's proposed investments, including:

1. A city-wide indoor air quality policy and bylaw that follows the latest recommendations from Health Canada, the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), and the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), with respect to reducing airborne disease transmission and fine particulate (PM2.5) pollution.²⁻⁵
2. A program to accelerate indoor air quality improvements across Toronto's buildings, including targeted incentives for HVAC upgrades and retrofits that meet the standards outlined in the City's IAQ policy, particularly in low-income and rental housing.
3. An IAQ monitoring system that measures CO₂ and PM2.5 levels in municipal buildings and public schools, with transparent, publicly accessible reporting.⁶

Upgrading HVAC systems would quickly lead to fewer sick days, improved productivity, and significant gains in physical and mental health.⁷ For low-income tenants and vulnerable residents, these upgrades can be life-changing, reducing exposure to airborne diseases, wildfire smoke, and chronic urban air pollution that exacerbate asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other health conditions.

Improving IAQ aligns with the City of Toronto's TransformTO⁸ goals by reducing emissions while strengthening climate resilience. It also advances accessibility and equity by making indoor spaces safer for people with chronic illnesses, disabilities, and compromised immune systems, many of whom cannot afford to relocate or mitigate poor air quality on their own.

We urge the Budget Committee to invest in the health of Toronto by prioritizing indoor air quality improvements. Doing so will help address long-standing inequities in housing and health, protect those most at risk, and ensure that all residents, regardless of income or circumstance, can breathe clean air in their homes.

Sincerely,

Low-Income Energy Network



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cc. City of Toronto Budget Committee, buc@toronto.ca
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References

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