

Identifying Current and Future Environmental Health Priorities in Rochester and the Finger Lakes Region

University of Rochester Environmental Health Sciences Center

University of Rochester Institute for Human Health and the Environment

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What did we do?

In 2024, the University of Rochester Environmental Health Sciences Center and Institute for Human Health and the Environment surveyed our Community Advisory Board (CAB) to identify key priority environmental health issues in the City of Rochester and the Finger Lakes Region. The Community Advisory Board is composed of representatives from over 30 organizations in the area doing environmental health-related work.

We sourced a list of environmental health issues from the CAB. We first distributed a free-response survey to CAB members asking:

1. What are the most important environmental health issues affecting people in the City of Rochester/Finger Lakes region?
2. Why do you think those are the most important issues?

Environmental health issues may vary between urban and rural areas, so these questions were asked separately for the City of Rochester and the Finger Lakes region. We used the responses (11 responses) to compile lists of priority issues for the City of Rochester and the Finger Lakes region that we presented and refined through discussion at a CAB meeting (21 attendees). Additionally, we identified several cross-cutting issues and overreaching themes that impacted many environmental health issues: climate change, social determinants of health (such as safe neighborhoods, access to healthcare, education, violence, poverty), and environmental justice.

We refined the lists into 9 priority environmental health issues for the City of Rochester and 8 for the Finger Lakes region. We grouped responses into themes using an environmental health lens to determine a final list of key priorities. The priority issues are bolded, with additional examples of what might be included where appropriate.

City of Rochester Priorities:

- **Difficulty accessing resources** (such as healthy food and healthcare) **due to the built environment**, including lack of alternative transportation infrastructure
- **Drinking water quality**
- **Greenspace and urban tree canopy**, including tree cover, access to and availability of greenspaces
- **Heat** (occupational exposure and/or indoor and outdoor temperatures)
- **Housing quality and environmental exposures**, including lead paint, mold, pests, asthma triggers, and access to safe and affordable housing
- **Inequities in environmental exposures and access to resources (environmental justice) ***

- **Legacy pollution**, such as brownfields, hazardous waste, contaminated soil
- **Outdoor air quality**, including air pollution from transportation and other sources
- **Water infrastructure/flooding**

*Based on feedback during the discussion, environmental justice was included both as an overarching theme and as a priority issue for the City of Rochester.

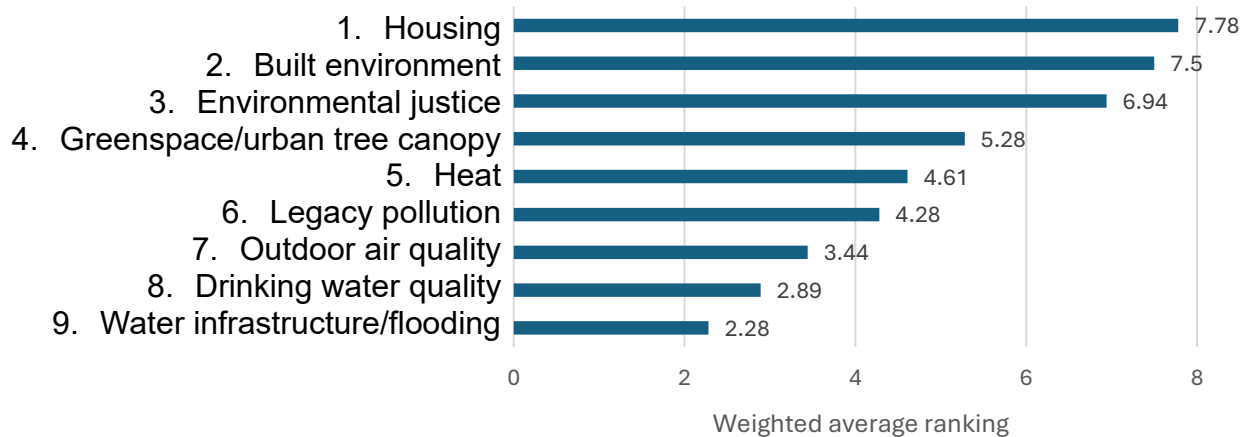
Finger Lakes Region Priorities:

- **Chemicals in consumer products**, such as endocrine disrupting chemicals
- **Difficulty accessing resources** (such as healthy food and healthcare) **due to the built environment**, including transportation and distance to services
- **Housing quality and environmental exposures**, including lead paint, mold, pests, asthma triggers, and access to safe and affordable housing
- **Occupational health of farmworkers**
- **Outdoor air quality**, including air pollution from transportation and other sources
- **Pollution from agriculture** such as pesticides and nutrients
- **Pollution from landfills** including leachate in water and air pollution (emissions and associated trucks)
- **Surface water quality** including harmful algal blooms, nutrients, and other pollutants

We then asked the CAB to rank the priorities (18 responses). Because the effects of climate change impact many environmental health concerns, we asked the CAB to rank the priorities based on their current importance in 2024 and their projected significance in the future (2034). We also asked if any key environmental health priorities were missing from the list.

What did we find?

City of Rochester Current Priority Environmental Health Issues

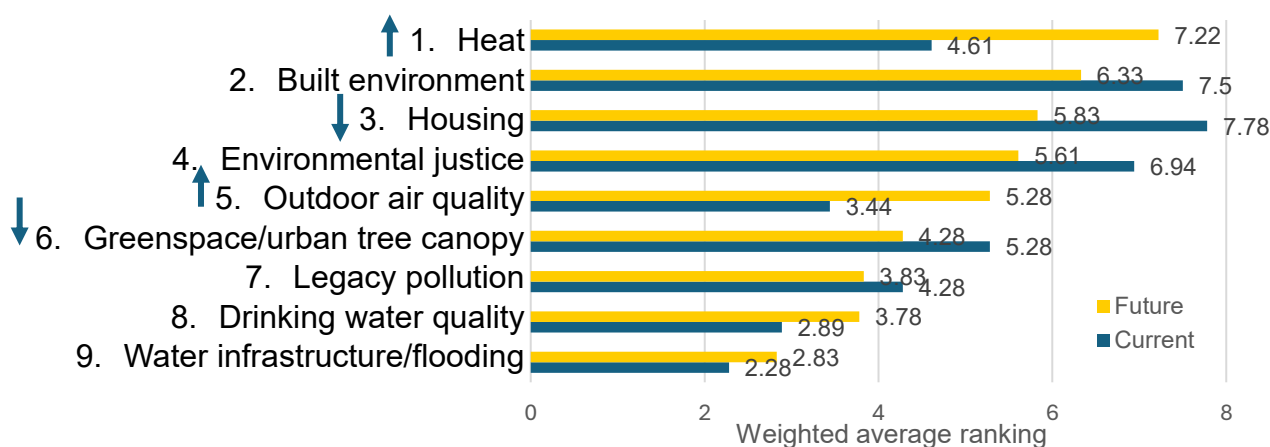


Priorities are abbreviated to fit on the graph axis. Scores are reported as weighted average rankings, where a ranking of 1 is given the highest value and a ranking of 9 the lowest.

Housing, the built environment, and environmental justice are top priorities in the City of Rochester. Respondents agreed about the highest and lowest priorities. 72% of respondents ranked housing quality and environmental exposures in the top 2. 88% of

respondents ranked difficulty accessing resources due to the built environment in the top 3. All respondents ranked inequities in environmental exposures and access to resources (environmental justice) in the top 5. 61% of respondents ranked drinking water quality and water infrastructure/flooding in the bottom 2. Multiple respondents suggested that chemicals in consumer products was missing from the list. There was less agreement about the middle priorities.

City of Rochester Future (2034) Priority Environmental Health Issues



Priorities are abbreviated to fit on the graph axis. Scores are reported as weighted average rankings, where a ranking of 1 is given the highest value and a ranking of 9 the lowest. Arrows indicate priorities that shifted by 2 or more spots compared to current rankings.

Heat is expected to become a top priority. 50% of respondents ranked heat among their top two concerns. Housing quality and environmental exposures, difficulty accessing resources due to the built environment, and inequities in environmental exposures and resource access (environmental justice) are anticipated to remain top priorities. However, there was less consensus about future priorities compared to current rankings.

Finger Lakes Region Current and Future Priority Environmental Health Issues

We did not have strong agreement on current or future rankings of environmental health priorities for the Finger Lakes Region among respondents. Therefore, we do not include the specific ranking results here, only the identified list of priorities. The lack of consensus about priority issues suggests that additional work is needed to assess the environmental health priorities of the region; for example, refinement of the priority list with input from additional representation from outside of Monroe County.

Did you use this report? We'd love to hear about it! To share, for questions, or for more information, please contact Rebecca_lauzon@urmc.rochester.edu.