

National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures

WORK GROUP CHARGES

General Work Group Charge

The *National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures* is grounded in the vision that the United States will use and manage chemicals in ways that are safe and healthy for all people. The project goal is to develop an action agenda for strengthening the nation's approach to protecting the public from harmful chemical exposures. Work groups are charged with identifying clear, achievable, action recommendations that will help achieve the project vision. The Leadership Council will utilize work group recommendations in developing its action agenda. Each work group will prepare a report outlining their assessment and recommendations and answering the following questions for their issue area:

- *What are the major components of the nation's approach in this area?*
- *What have been the major successes in this area over the last 40 years?*
- *What are the major unmet needs?*
- *What solutions do you propose to help improve the system?*
- *What can be done quickly (1-2 years)?*
- *What recent or ongoing initiatives might impact this area?*

Recognizing that many organizations and individuals play important roles in protecting the public's health from harmful chemical exposures, the action agenda that emerges from this process will be directed toward the full range of actors who might take steps to strengthen our nation's approach in this area. More specifically, the audience for the final action agenda will include the environmental public health community; policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels; industry groups and individual businesses; labor organizations; research organizations; community and nongovernmental organizations; and the public at large. While the audience for the action agenda will be broad, individual work groups may choose to direct their reports to a more narrow set of actors.

Work groups, in consultation with members of the project team, will also be responsible for suggesting questions to pose to members of the public through mechanisms such as the community conversation toolkit, the web-discussion platform, and public forums. The results of these deliberations will be provided to work groups for use in developing their recommendations.

Policies and Practices Work Group Final Draft Charge

The National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures is working to develop an action agenda for strengthening the nation's approach to protecting the public from harmful chemical exposures.

Charge

In order to protect public health, the Policies and Practices Workgroup will determine prioritized actions that can be taken through legislation, regulation and policy that will prevent harmful chemical exposures and spur the development and use of safer alternatives.

To accomplish this charge, the Policies and Practices Work Group will identify policies and practices of government agencies and the private sector that will facilitate accomplishing these goals and highlight opportunities and examples for achieving them. The Policies and Practices Work Group will use the following "layers of prevention" framework to guide its work:

1. Primary prevention – Preventing harm by eliminating and/or reducing exposures to harmful chemicals and by spurring the development and use of safer and healthier alternatives
2. Secondary prevention – Addressing harm by better producing, using, and managing chemicals, and including greater use of safer alternatives
3. Tertiary prevention – Addressing harm caused by historic practices, by protecting the health of at-risk populations and contaminated communities

For each layer, the following questions would be answered:

- What is the baseline or current situation?
- What should policy approaches look like if they are to strengthen this prevention layer?
- What actions can be taken to eliminate disparities and inequities in preventing or addressing exposures to harmful chemicals?
- What is the role of federal, state, and local agencies in promoting these policies?
- What is the role of the private sector, including business, academia, and NGOs in promoting these policies?
- What resources and incentives are necessary for government and private entities to get there?

The group will focus its efforts on 1) identifying a set of universal principles that protect the public and workers from harmful chemical exposures, 2) characterizing and analyzing these principles as they relate to select policies and proposals through the lens of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention, and 3) developing recommendations grounded in these principles.

Education and Communication Workgroup Final Charge

Goals

The goals of this workgroup are to:

1. Ensure timely, accurate, and clear communication of information about links between chemical exposures and health is provided to medical, public health, and environmental health professionals (“health professionals”), the general public, and the country’s workforce.
2. Contribute to the development of a network and a pipeline of health professionals competent to help recognize, address, and prevent chemically-related health problems.
3. Offer a model of government/public/workforce/health professional communication and engagement that is timely, responsive, accountable, and transparent.
4. Ensure that discussions between agencies and communities about chemical exposures and health are transparent and maximally accessible.

Charge

To meet these goals, the Education and Communication Workgroup will make actionable recommendations that:

1. Identify audiences that could most effectively use, communicate, and/or benefit from information about chemicals and public health, such as, but not limited to, workers, health care professionals, public health authorities, the media, inhabitants of homes and communities burdened with chemical contamination, parents of young children, pregnant women, and individuals with chemical sensitivities.
2. Identify the knowledge base and tools needed by these target audiences to enhance understanding of the potential effects of chemical exposure on health; potential solutions and preventive strategies; and the roles and responsibilities of government agencies and other institutions in identifying, protecting against, remediating, and, preventing harmful exposures.
3. Facilitate new and creative strategies to enhance understanding of chemical exposures and public health among health professionals, the general public, and the workforce.
4. Facilitate new and creative strategies to enhance the knowledge and skills of health professionals so they can more efficiently and effectively address the concerns of their patients and communities about chemical exposures.

5. Ensure an educational pipeline to produce future health professionals and public health workers who are themselves diverse and prepared to meet the needs of vulnerable and diverse populations.
6. Suggest new strategies that promote meaningful inclusion of stakeholders; provide a structure for stakeholder dialogue; and facilitate the transfer of knowledge and experiences about chemicals and health between and among the public, the workforce, health professionals, government agencies, industry, and other relevant institutions, communities, and individuals.
7. Facilitate new, practical and effective methods to enable members of the public, the workforce, and health professions to relay information to relevant government agencies about specific local chemical exposures or threats of exposure so that community-based knowledge about chemical contamination and public health can become a force-multiplier by enhancing government knowledge about and response to chemical exposures.

Activities

The workgroup will inventory current efforts of government, industry, and non-governmental organizations to:

1. **Provide information and education** about chemical exposures and health to the public, including underrepresented and underserved populations, including people with chemical sensitivities.
 2. **Review studies or evaluations** of the effectiveness of these information, communication, and education programs.
 3. **Assess existing efforts** to build the capacity of health professionals to address chemical exposures and health.
 4. **Identify existing channels** through which government agencies can receive information about chemical exposures and health from the public, the workforce, and members of the health professions.
 5. **Review the published and gray literature** on environmental health literacy of health professionals, the general public, and the workforce, as well as issues of concern to the public, the workforce, and the health professions concerning chemical exposures and health.
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Serving Communities Work Group Final Charge

*The National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures is working to develop an action agenda for strengthening the nation's approach to protecting the public from harmful chemical exposures. The **Serving Communities** work group will develop recommendations to improve health and well-being within communities by advancing environmental justice and the protection of communities and the environment from harmful chemical exposures.*

Charge

In order to protect communities from harmful chemical exposures and advance environmental justice, the Serving Communities work group will focus its efforts on four overarching themes:

- 4. Community Advocacy, Leadership and Research** –helping communities to advocate for themselves by providing ready access to useful information; building community leadership capability; supporting community-based participatory research; facilitating community members' access to resources, including funding and education; developing a dialog and building trust between all stakeholders; etc.
- 5. Government Operations (Internal and External)** – focus on strengthening governmental responses at the local, state, federal and tribal levels by expanding, enhancing, increasing, and improving: 1) data and evaluation; 2) training; 3) coordination and partnerships; 4) regulation and enforcement; 5) communication and education; 6) operations and practices.
- 6. Addressing Past and Current, and Preventing Future, Environmental and Chemical Exposures** – focus on: assessing current regulatory, enforcement and compliance processes and providing new thinking; encouraging a community-based participatory research approach¹ to the collection and interpretation of data for the purpose of responding to contaminated sites; promoting recognition of low, chronic, synergistic and cumulative exposures on health; and promoting the stimulation of the production and use of safer chemicals through the cooperation of all involved stakeholders.
- 7. Restoring Health and Developing Community Resiliency** – focus on disease prevention and the promotion and enhancement of healthier, sustainable communities; promote integration between environmental and public health governance, practice and infrastructure with the delivery of health care services; and identify and foster approaches which help ensure that emerging government initiatives benefit communities at greatest risk.

¹ Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a "collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community, has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change to improve health outcomes and eliminate health disparities." (WK Kellogg Foundation Community Health Scholars Program)

Background

Chemical exposures from a variety of sources are contributing to poor health outcomes for people across the country. Studies have documented that people of color and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental harm, and vulnerable groups, including pregnant women and children, are especially at risk. We need to address harmful chemical exposures to better protect communities.

While the public relies on federal, state, local and tribal authorities to protect them from, and inform them of, potential hazardous chemical exposures and provide them with thorough, objective assessments of potential harm associated with chemical exposures, the reality is that this does not always happen. The government must inform communities of potential harmful chemical exposures and provide them with timely, unbiased analyses of the situation and guide appropriate protective and/or remedial measures. Successfully serving the needs of concerned communities requires access to needed data; trained and experienced staff; funding for community groups and federal, tribal, state and local health agencies; working relationships among diverse agencies; clear communication practices; collaborative partnerships with the private sector; and transparent and participatory decision-making processes.

Scientific Understanding Work Group Final Charge

Scientific Understanding: The work group's charge is to (a) identify shortcomings in our current scientific understanding that limit, and (b) make recommendations to fill knowledge gaps that could enhance, our ability to assess health effects and to inform decisions at all levels to minimize the health risks of chemicals.

Research related to many scientific disciplines is needed to fill the large gaps in knowledge about the causes and consequences of human exposure to toxic chemicals (including chemicals emitted by biological contaminants). Recent scientific advances provide the opportunity to address some of these gaps.

Potential activities for the proposed work group include reviewing recent efforts to address known gaps and shortcomings in toxicological research (e.g., EPA's Strategic Plan for Reviewing the Toxicity of Chemicals), epidemiological research (e.g., the National Children's Study), clinical research (e.g., intervention studies), exposure science, the compilation of scientific information to inform risk assessments (e.g., ATSDR's ToxProfiles), and the development of technologies to prevent and reduce health impacts (e.g., green chemistry). Based on this review, the group will offer suggestions for government, academic, and private sector research efforts. The group will also consider improvements related to the compilation of, and

public access to, risk information. Finally, the work group will consider strategies for filling knowledge gaps and addressing emerging priorities through both increased coordination and changes in research emphasis.

Monitoring Work Group Final Charge

Monitoring Work Group Charge: facilitating the collection, analysis and interpretation of information on chemicals, including their sources, uses, exposures, and associated health outcomes.

The prevention and control of adverse health outcomes related to chemical exposures requires the ongoing collection, integration, analysis, and interpretation of data about chemicals, including their sources, uses, exposures, and associated health outcomes. Ongoing surveillance also provides an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies. Many federal, state, local, and tribal government bodies currently collect relevant data.

This working group will analyze current surveillance and data collection activities and recommend actions to fill data gaps, better utilize existing data, and improve coordination among the many organizations collecting relevant information. The group will address monitoring of chemicals in both human tissues (biomonitoring) and environmental media, including soil, air, water, consumer products, food, and in key built environments (e.g. schools and homes). Further, the group will address options for enhancing the interpretability of exposure information for the purpose of analyzing associations with health outcome data. The group will work together with members of the chemical emergencies work group to develop recommendations related to monitoring acute events.

Chemical Emergencies Work Group Final Charge

Chemical Emergencies: preventing, preparing for, responding to, recovering from, and mitigating chemical incidents.

Chemical emergencies can be devastating to human and animal populations, the environment, and the economy. Safeguarding public health requires analyzing and eliminating vulnerabilities; identifying and communicating information about hazards; and reducing risks through the development and implementation of effective emergency prevention, preparedness, and response plans. While many public and private agencies have roles in chemical emergency prevention, preparedness and response, coordination among concerned parties has not been optimized.

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Further, there remain shortcomings, gaps, and redundancies in the chemical emergency preparedness system.

This group will make recommendations on issues including the prevention of chemical emergencies, chemical infrastructure security, monitoring of chemical facilities and events, and the preparedness and response capabilities of 1) emergency management officials; 2) state and local public health agencies and their governing boards; 3) responders, receivers, and providers on the local, state, tribal, and federal levels; 4) the chemical industry; and 5) affected, or potentially affected communities.

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