



# Environmental Health and Impact on Cancer: Policy and Partnership Development

SUMMARY FROM SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT PRESENTERS: JUNE 23, 2022  
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The environments in which people live, learn, work and play can have profound effects on health and well-being. One role of public health in cancer prevention is to understand the links of environmental chemicals to cancer risk and the organizational, economic and political dynamics that can impede or contribute to progress. Public health agencies can convene diverse partners to address environmental carcinogens and invest in healthy environments.

The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hosted a webinar to explore how partnerships and policy engagement can be effective approaches for integrating environmental carcinogen reduction into cancer prevention and control. An expert panel shared their experiences in successfully engaging partners in taking action to reduce cancer risk, with recommendations for states to capitalize on their primary capacities to leverage partnerships related to these issues. A state health officer and state cancer director provided a response to the panel presentations, sharing perspective on the potential impact of this approach.

The following is a summary of the panelists' presentations and the audience Q and A:

## What prompted action to seek new partnerships?

### Cancer and Environment Network of SW Pennsylvania:

- Cancer rates in SW Pennsylvania are up to 50% higher than other parts of the country.
- Cancer risk is 26% higher in environmental justice areas (where 20% or more individuals live at or below the federal poverty line and/or 30% identify as non-white).
- Developed a collaborative network for a systems approach to engage people and groups who can influence different parts of the system and develop strategic initiatives.

### Columbia University:

- Breast cancer risk is increased during key windows of susceptibility during the lifetime.
- Communities with an unequal burden of chemical exposures had more people who identified from minority groups and more living below the federal poverty line.

### Panel presenters:

- **Dani Wilson**, MSW, Director of the Cancer and Environment Network of Southwestern Pennsylvania
- **Mary Beth Terry**, PhD, Professor of Epidemiology in the Department of Environmental Health Sciences, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health
- **Darcie Green**, CEO, Executive Director of Latinas Contra Cancer
- **Nancy Buermeier**, MS, Program and Policy Director, Breast Cancer Prevention Partners

### Respondents:

- **Umai Shah**, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health, State of Washington
- **Becky Kishbaugh**, BSW, Director, Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, Pennsylvania Department of Public Health



### Latinas Contra Cancer

- Health inequities and risk factors for cancer that were known prior to the pandemic became more urgent during the pandemic.

### Breast Cancer Prevention Partners

- Communities that bear disproportionate exposures to toxic chemicals via land, air and water pollution experience increased risk of breast cancer and other chronic diseases.
- Their report, Paths to Prevention, identified 23 risk factors, 330 policy interventions and 85 research questions for the primary prevention of breast cancer.

The best way to assess a need is to ask those who are directly affected

- Darcie Green, CEO, Executive Director of Latinas Contra Cancer

### What approaches were used?

**Cancer Network of SW PA:** Developed a coalition that includes non-traditional partners intent on disrupting the cycle that depends on cancer for the economy to be successful.

**Columbia University:** Created an Environmental Carcinogens Action Team that includes 19 organizations from around New York as part of the New York State Cancer Consortium with a mission to reduce the burden of cancer diagnoses from known carcinogens.

**Latinas Contra Cancer:** Collaborated with community-based organizations and gave voice to people who were experiencing inequities associated with increased cancer risk.

**Breast Cancer Prevention Partners:** Focused on data to identify priority issues and developed partnerships with communities and organizations to reduce environmental carcinogen exposure.



We spend so much time collecting the dots; we need to spend more time connecting the dots.

-Umai Shah, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health, State of Washington

You don't need to lobby to impact change.

- Nancy Buermeyer, MS, Program and Policy Director, Breast Cancer Prevention Partners



## Accomplishments to Date

### Cancer and Environment Network of SW Pennsylvania:

- Cross-workgroup collaboration led by the policy workgroup resulted in adoption of the WHO Declaration for Cancer Prevention.
- The education workgroup used Cancer Bridges to align the Network's goals with those of individual organizations in educating and informing people about cancer risk.

### Columbia University:

- Developed a repository of existing education materials from partners across New York state.
- Completed inventory of available environmental exposure data sources in New York.
- Completed comprehensive county-level analysis of environmental exposures, behaviors and socioeconomic risk factors and cancer incidence in New York.
- Developed a presentation to be used to inform New York state legislators about cancer trends and environmental carcinogens.

### Latinas Contra Cancer

- Developed a post-pandemic, holistic view of the problems experienced by the Latino, population.
- Brought together diverse viewpoints to increase effectiveness of mutually beneficial solutions.

### Breast Cancer Prevention Partners

- Advocated for the adoption of a regulation to limit pesticide application within ¼ mile of schools.
- California enacted the first requirement in the country to disclose cleaning product ingredients on labels and online. Worked with impacted businesses (e.g., P&C, SC Johnson) to allow time for reformulation before the regulation was implemented.
- Engaged the California Professional Firefighters in successfully implementing a ban on PFAS in firefighter foam and food packaging; similarly worked with the California Association of Sanitation Agencies responsible for water cleaning.



Be creative when seeking partners; a department working to reduce asthma probably is also working to reduce lung cancer.

- **Nancy Buermeyer**, MS,  
Program and Policy Director, Breast Cancer Prevention Partners

Inequalities in exposure are not natural occurrences.

- **Darcie Green**,  
CEO, Executive Director of Latinas Contra Cancer



## Lessons Learned and Recommendations for State Health Agencies:

Panel presenters and respondents from the state health agency perspective provided recommendations for state health agencies as they facilitate the development of partnerships to increase understanding of the impact of environmental chemicals and cancers and take action to reduce exposure through a systems approach.

Collect and coordinate the use of data to help identify priority areas and inform interventions.

- Data informs action, so use it to guide the conversation. Make sure the data indicators and measures are complemented by stories from individuals who have lived the experience.
- Explore use of data from the CDC-funded National Environmental Health Tracking Network (25 state networks are funded), which compiles health and environmental data in a single resource. [ephtracking.cdc.gov](http://ephtracking.cdc.gov)

Build Coalitions/strategically convene partners.

- Collaborate with community-based organizations
- Fully engage people who are experiencing inequities to identify solutions.
- Convene partners who work at the intersection of science and environmental programs.
- Engage people who are impacted by policy, systems and environmental changes, such as firefighters, cleaning product suppliers, developers and builders.
- Collaborate with university researchers and experts who can contribute extensive scientific credibility to the issues.

Increase Education and Awareness.

- Bring awareness to and advocate for environmental justice policies which improve and protect the quality of life of low-income individuals.
- Support companies switching to more environmentally friendly cleaning solutions, products and services.

Leverage resources from across programs, agencies, and coalition partners for practice and policy changes.

- Inform policy change by collecting and analyzing data on environmental impacts and sharing with coalition members; use data to share the story with policy makers.
- Provide a forum for organizations to share their efforts to reduce environmental carcinogens; encourage environmental programs to join the state coalition and participate in data analysis.
- Engage universities and their networks in identifying and developing evidence-informed interventions.

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