

Summary of
Exploring the Evidence and Finding Solutions:
A Forum on the Links Between
Early Environmental Exposures and Chronic Diseases
6 October 2009, Toronto, Ontario

Forum Overview and Objectives

On October 6th, 2009, the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health & Environment (CPCHE) and the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA) held a Forum in Toronto entitled *Exploring the Evidence and Finding Solutions: A Forum on the Links Between Early Environmental Exposures and Chronic Diseases*. The overall goal for the Forum was to explore the links between early environmental exposures to toxic chemicals and the development of chronic disease. The specific objectives identified were:

- To foster exchange of information and perspectives on emerging scientific evidence (and associated knowledge gaps) regarding the known and suspected links between early (i.e., preconception, fetal and childhood) environmental exposures to toxic chemicals/pollutants and the development of chronic diseases/conditions.
- To share and generate ideas on ways to better integrate chronic disease prevention and children's environmental health protection in Ontario, in both policy and practice.
- To foster interaction and build collaboration among the CPCHE and OCDPA partners, and with other groups/institutions working on issues of relevance to children's environmental health protection and chronic disease prevention.

The Forum invited respected practitioners, researchers, and advocates to speak and draw connections between environmental exposures and health outcomes and their relevance to chronic disease prevention. Speakers include Dr. Judith Bossé (Public Health Agency of Canada); Myriam Beaulne (CPCHE); Dr. Loren Vanderlinden (Toronto Public Health); Dr. Alan Abelson (University of Toronto); Dr. Monica Campbell (Toronto Public Health); Kathy Cooper (Canadian Environmental Law Association) and a video presentation by Dr. Bruce Blumberg (University of California, Irvine). Over 50 participants working in the area of environmental health, public health, children's health and environment, and chronic disease prevention attended the forum.

The event was an opportunity for organizations from the environment and health promotion sectors to meet and address early environmental exposure and chronic disease prevention, and to explore ways of fostering better integration and synergy among ongoing efforts in these two areas. It also served as a platform for CPCHE and OCDPA partners to exchange knowledge and inform future planning in the context of their ongoing collaborative project. The morning plenary sessions were followed by interactive table discussions in the afternoon which afforded participants an opportunity to share knowledge and perspectives and generate ideas for possible action.

Key Themes

Throughout the event, participants noted that the public is continually exposed to small amounts of numerous toxic substances, of which the sources and routes of exposure and potential health risks are largely unknown to the public. Following are some of the key themes and opportunities for action that were discussed related to achieving a mutually supportive approach to chronic disease prevention and children's environmental health protection:

- Advancing awareness raising, education and improved message delivery;
- Bridging knowledge gaps through conducting research and engaging in effective knowledge exchange strategies;
- Examining lessons learned and identifying best practices;
- Advocating for policy change and implementing effective healthy public policies at the national, provincial and local levels;
- Cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration to galvanize action and work collectively.

Next Steps

Discussions from the CPCHE-OCDPA Forum will help inform the collaborative actions which both CPCHE and OCDPA could take to address early environmental exposures and chronic disease prevention. The Joint CPCHE-OCDPA Collaboration is currently developing a report (anticipated for release in Fall/Winter 2010) which explores the scientific evidence linking early environmental exposures to toxic chemicals/pollutants with the development of specific chronic diseases, and related policy dimensions. The report will also incorporate ideas and issues raised at the October 6th forum.

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